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Treasuries of Modern Prose

Modern Short Plays

by

JOHN DRINKWATER
SIR WALTER RALEIGH
LADY GREGORY
LAURENCE BINYON
"SAKI" (H. H. MUNRO)
EDEN PHILLPOTTS
LORD DUNSANY

Treasuries of Modern Prose

Selected by H. A. TREBLE, M.A.

SELECTIONS FROM THE PROSE WORKS OF J. M. BARRIE

SELECTIONS FROM THE PLAYS OF J. M. BARRIE

KRAG, THE KOOTENAY RAM and other Animal Stories, by ERNEST THOMPSON SETON

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MODERN SHORT PLAYS, by Various Authors.

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ROBIN HOOD AND THE PEDLAR

JOHN DRINKWATER

ROBIN HOOD AND THE PEDLAR

JOHN DRINKWATER

At the edge of a Wood.

ROBIN HOOD [*sings*].

Let life go unforbidden,
Straight-limbed among the green,
And laughter be unchidden,
And gravity unseen;
They're grey men are the town men
With crooked legs to run,
But we're the jolly brown men
Carousing with the sun.

I'm brother to the beech tree,
I'm brother to the oak,
And glad the little beasts be
And glad the feathered folk,
And when the clouds are chiding
I'm happy for the rain,
And when the sun goes riding
I'm happy then again.

[*He blows his horn and his men come from the wood.* ROBIN *repeats a few lines of the song and all sing together. As they are finishing, an old* PEDLAR *hobbles towards them, as though suffering, and falls wearily. They tend him, and he revives.*]

ROBIN. Not much comfort where you've been a guest, eh, father pedlar? Bruises, eh? And whose was the stick?

THE PEDLAR. Nottingham, master—do you know Nottingham?

ROBIN. Well, yes—we do call at Nottingham now and again. In the dark mostly, to be sure—but still, a very good place. Why?

THE PEDLAR. Do you know the Sheriff?

ROBIN. Oh—the Sheriff. So that's it.

[*All his men become mischievously interested.*]

THE PEDLAR. He beat me.

ROBIN. Yes. It's a way of his. He's been told of it before. Why did he beat you?

THE PEDLAR. Because I told him the truth.

ROBIN. That always tickles his temper. What was it?

THE PEDLAR. You were singing a song just now.

ROBIN. Well?

THE PEDLAR. You care for a song?

ROBIN. A good song is a good heart, father pedlar. But what of that?

THE PEDLAR. There's a man in Nottingham who makes songs. He's a clean man, and clean ringing songs he makes. A poor man, but he wants nothing but a sixpence once in a while. I was walking along Trent side, master, when it was Monday evening, and I heard a song across the water, as clear and sweet as a cornflower in a maid's white dress. I know a good song—and this was clear and sweet, and rich like harvest elms. And Tuesday I heard it again, in Nottingham streets, and it was a tall fellow singing,

lean, with a friendly face. I spoke with him. He'd come into the town he said to sing for sixpence, and would be back again to the fields beyond Trent. And then a Sheriff's man took him, and they used him—I wouldn't use a bad dog so, master. And I followed, and I slipped into the hall. And I told the Sheriff there that this was an ill thing and a dirty thing. And he had me beaten and thrown out. I waited a little, and I heard angry talk. How it was prison for the tall fellow, and how because he sang ballads in their streets he was judged a vagabond and a pest and was to smart for it. And I came away.

[*He has blazed with excitement, and now falls back exhausted.*

ROBIN *and his men hear his tale with growing indignation, until at the close there is a howl of anger.*]

ROBIN. Master Sheriff shall learn this time. We'll tease him this time, eh?

[*There is a loud assent from all.*]

ROBIN. Come, the fashion of it?

[*They form into a semi-circle, as in council.* ROBIN, FRIAR TUCK, LITTLE JOHN, *and three or four others in the centre. The* PEDLAR *is given food and drink. Each decision of the council is greeted with cheers.*]

ROBIN. This singing fellow must be freed.

LITTLE JOHN. And offered a green suit.

ROBIN. Aye, he shall come to us if he will.

FRIAR TUCK. And our friend the Sheriff shall pay.

ANOTHER. Let him answer for it here in the greenwood.

ANOTHER. Aye, bring him here.

LITTLE JOHN. And who's to fetch him? Shall I?

[*He makes to go.*]

ROBIN. Slowly, John, slowly. To free the ballad man and to fetch the Sheriff. Who is willing?

[*There is a general eagerness for the errands.*]

ROBIN. Then it must be by lot. A line.

[ROBIN *and all his men form into a straight line,* FRIAR TUCK *somewhere about the seventh place.*]

ROBIN. Two numbers, father pedlar.

THE PEDLAR. Numbers? Three; eleven.

ROBIN. Three for the Singer, eleven for the Sheriff.

[FRIAR TUCK, *unseen by* ROBIN, *rapidly moves up behind the others to the third place. The man whose place he takes is about to protest, but* FRIAR TUCK *grips his arm and puts his hand over his mouth, humorously threatening him.*]

ROBIN. Now.

[*They number down,* FRIAR TUCK *steps out on number three, and* ROBIN *himself on eleven.*]

ROBIN. Good enough numbers.

[LITTLE JOHN, *who is far down the line, comes up and looks at the two with disfavour.*]

LITTLE JOHN. And I saw two magpies twice this morning, the lying little chickens.

[*All laugh and the line breaks up.*]

ROBIN [*to* FRIAR TUCK]. Choose your men. I go alone.

[FRIAR TUCK *picks three men, including the one he has displaced. A voice is heard in the distance crying a proclamation, and three of the* SHERIFF'S MEN *are seen approaching.*]

ROBIN. Quick—the trees. Come, all of you; quietly; when I say "Lawk-a-mussy-be." [*To* FRIAR TUCK] Off to your ballad man. Round there—they can't see you so.

[*The men go into the wood,* FRIAR TUCK *and his company off on their journey, skirting round trees to miss the* SHERIFF'S MEN. ROBIN *untying a ragged cloak and hood that are over his shoulder and putting them on, conceals himself behind a tree.*

The SHERIFF'S MEN *come in, and one cries from a paper.*]

Whereas the notorious outlaw, Robin Hood, has on divers occasions crossed the authority of His Majesty's Officer, the most honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Nottingham, and whereas the said Robin Hood is unconformable to the law of this land, now be it known that the most honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Nottingham will pay the sum of forty pounds for the person of the said Robin Hood, or for his dead body the sum of twenty pounds. Long live the King.

[*Another pins up a copy of the proclamation on the tree behind which* ROBIN *is hiding.* ROBIN *appears, feigning a yokel simplicity.*]

ROBIN. Eh, forty pound. That's a main big lot of money. But I say, Master Officer.

SHERIFF'S MAN. Well, dirt?

ROBIN. Dirt—that's as mebbe. But I say, Master Officer, what's the use of calling all that out when there's nobody listening?

SHERIFF'S MAN. What do you know about the law's ways, pigskin? You come with us. The honourable Sheriff wants a few more lads in the stables and such.

ROBIN. Does he, now? Now do you know, I be main frightened of horses, that I be. I can't abide 'em. But why don't you wait till folk be about before you call out all that talk? Now I just happened to hear, and mebbe I could help.

SHERIFF'S MAN. Twice in every mile for ten miles round Nottingham that's to be cried. And you're a likely ragamuffin to help. Come and serve the Sheriff. There's other jobs besides horses.

ROBIN. Well, do you know, Master Officer, I can't abide the Sheriff no more than I can abide horses.

SHERIFF'S MAN. Careful, pumpkin, or you'll learn more about the honourable Sheriff than you want.

ROBIN. I think that Sheriff of yours, Master Officer, is a dirty, black, snivelling, rascally toad; of course, no offence, Master Officer.

SHERIFF'S MAN. Seize him, the scurrilous clod.

[*The men go to take* ROBIN, *but hesitate before a sharp rap on the tender part of their arms.*]

ROBIN. Now don't be angry, Master Officer, I can tell you about Robin Hood.

SHERIFF'S MAN. Nonsense. What?

ROBIN. Lawk-a-mussy-be!

[*He looks straight away from the greenwood at the back, as though staring at something. The* SHERIFF'S OFFICERS *follow his look, whilst* ROBIN'S *men come quietly from the trees and form up a ring behind them.*]

ROBIN. Now just look at that, Master Officer.

SHERIFF'S MAN. What, crazy-brain?

ROBIN. No, not there, Master Officer—the other way, there.

[*As he speaks he removes his cloak and the* SHERIFF'S MEN *turn round. They are too dumbfounded to move, and fall on their knees in terror.*

They are seized.]

ROBIN. That fellow's robe, his hat and chain and belt.

[*They take these from the first officer and give them to* ROBIN, *who puts them on.*]

ROBIN. Now that is mighty fortunate. You stay here, Master Officer, and I will go and see "the honourable Sheriff of His Majesty's loyal city of Nottingham." I want to tell him all about "the notorious outlaw, Robin Hood."

[*There is a burst of laughter as he mimics the officers. Then cheering as he goes off towards Nottingham. The* SHERIFF'S MEN *are bound, not roughly.*

There is an interlude to mark the passing of a night. First the outlaws gather round their fires and eat their evening meal. Then they sing.]

THE OUTLAW'S SONG

Joe the Miller he grinds the corn
And gives it us free of a Monday morn,
And we've bread as sweet as blossom of thorn.

Chorus.

Blossom of thorn, blossom of thorn,
As sweet as blossom of thorn.

We are Hobman's friends, and to Kate says he,
Let the latch of the dairy door be free,
And Kate's as right as a girl can be.

Chorus.

As a girl can be, as a girl can be,
As right as a girl can be.

Where mine is yours and short is tall
The arrow of one is the arrow of all,
And there's supper for any who care to call.

Chorus.

Who care to call, care to call,
For any who care to call.

LITTLE JOHN. Now, Pedlar, a tale for your supper.

THE PEDLAR. I've a great stock of tales. Of battle they are, and of cities in far pagan lands, and of love, and of kings and king's men false and loyal. Shall it be a story of a king?

[*The crowd listens to the* PEDLAR *tolerantly.*]

LITTLE JOHN. Now I shouldn't wonder, Pedlar, if you know a mighty deal about the likes of kings. [*His fellows laugh.*] Have you ever been to Court, Pedlar? [*And again.*]

THE PEDLAR. Yes.

LITTLE JOHN. And seen the King—seen Richard the Lion Heart?

THE PEDLAR. Yes.

LITTLE JOHN. And eaten at his table, I shouldn't wonder, eh, Pedlar?

THE PEDLAR. Well, I wouldn't boast——

LITTLE JOHN. That's right, Pedlar—don't boast—it's a bad habit and has no friends hereabouts.

THE PEDLAR. But I have eaten at Lion Heart's table.

LITTLE JOHN. And checked his hasty tongue, perhaps? They say there are times it goes a little wildly.

THE PEDLAR. Yes, I've scolded the King many's the time.

LITTLE JOHN. Well now, if I'm to listen to a lie, let it be a good full-chested one, that there's no mistaking, say I. You've old bones and old brains, Pedlar, or some of them would fare ill for this. But go on. Spin away. What's this tale of the King?

THE PEDLAR.

There was a King and his name was—well,
He went with a great sword in his hand
And travelled away to the Holy Land,
And many and many a stout wall fell
And many and many a pagan band.

He set his storied crown aside,
He left the royal ease of his throne
And the mellow shires which were his own,
To be where the banners of war blew wide
In the land of the sepulchre hewn in stone.

And men he left from Devon to Tweed
Should honour his name in kingly rule,
And some of 'em snugly said—" This fool
Leaves us the corn and goes threshing the weed,
And now is the time for treasure to breed."

But a beggar man came to the English gate,
And day by day he travelled alone
Where ruffling jacks made mock of a throne—
And a reckoning soon or a reckoning late
Is a reckoning still and a reckoning straight.

LITTLE JOHN. Well told, well told. But Richard is not in England yet.

THE PEDLAR. Richard? Who said I spoke of Richard? I said but a king—any king—any king, Master John.

[*The outlaws fall asleep one by one; a guard paces round the camp. The* PEDLAR *sleeps too. A troop of elves and fairies come out of the wood, dancing, unseen by the guard. They dance, first apart from the sleeping forms of the outlaws, then among them, and then they sing.*]

Grudge nothing to Robin, O valley and wood,
For Robin is honest is Robin Hood.

And may the lantern of Little John
Be bright as ever a lantern shone.

And may the platter of Father Tuck
Bear never a loaf but the loaves of luck.

Let kindness fall to the men who are kind,
And their fare be sweet from core to rind.

The profit o' days shall never be lean
For the merry men all of the Lincoln Green.

For an easy heart is a properer thing
Than all the treasure-chests of a king.

He has little to lose who has little to keep,
And enough for the day brings bounty of sleep.

[*One places a narrow crown of gold on the head of the sleeping* PEDLAR. *A cock crows and they hurry away. For a moment there is silence and no movement but the pacing of the guard. Then* ROBIN'S *horn is heard in the distance. The guard wakes all, as* ROBIN *comes running in. They crowd round him.*]

ROBIN. Not a doubt came against me. His honour wise-pate swallowed me as eagerly as a jack takes a gudgeon. News, your honour, great news, I cried. That plague Robin Hood, your honour, will be at such a place betimes in the morning to meet one they call Maid Marian. He will be alone, your honour, and may be taken as readily as a gravelled swift. I can lead any you will to the place, your honour. Good, cries the Sheriff, I'll be in this hunting myself. Then it's sure luck to that hunting, your honour, says I. And he bids two of his bowmen be ready. When shall we start? In an hour, says I, but let there be more than two with us, your honour; this Robin is cunning quarry. Well thought, says he, and calls out some four or five more. Just like that he dropped into my hand, as easily as a ripe filbert from its hood. We walked through the night—over some queer land too I brought them—it was a pretty Sheriff up to his waist in muddy water. I left them an arrow's flight back there to breathe, while I went forward to see we were not astray. I feared we might be out of the

path, not knowing much of the land hereabouts [*laughing*]. Listen. [*To one of his men*] Go you to Marian, and bid her come at once and wait. [*To another*] When I say "Robin Hood is here now" drive an arrow into the ground by me. And the word for all is, "Lawk-a-mussy-be." Again and quietly. In, quickly.

[*He goes off to the* SHERIFF, *the messenger goes to* MARIAN, *and the rest make ready to hide themselves. They notice the sleeping* PEDLAR *for the first time, the crown still on his head. They wake him.*]

LITTLE JOHN. What's this?

THE PEDLAR. Well now, it looks like a crown.

LITTLE JOHN. And how do pedlars come by crowns?

THE PEDLAR. It's odd, isn't it?

LITTLE JOHN. Odd thieving, eh, Pedlar?

THE PEDLAR. No. Not stolen. It's odd. But I'll wear it and thank the giver.

[*He puts it on, and all go into the wood.* ROBIN *comes in still disguised and with him the* SHERIFF *and six soldiers, very muddy and footweary.*]

ROBIN. This is the place, your honour.

THE SHERIFF. And a plaguey long way and a plaguey rough way from Nottingham too.

ROBIN. But Robin Hood to carry back with, your honour—that's a thought makes easy travelling, eh?

THE SHERIFF. I'll twist him and fray his green coat.

ROBIN. To be sure, your honour. Now here's a place for hiding, your honour.

[*They hide behind some trees, where they can be seen by the audience.*

MARIAN *comes in, looking enquiringly about her.*]

ROBIN. That's the wench. Robin Hood is not a mile away now, your honour may be sure.

[MARIAN *walks up and down expectantly. The* SHERIFF *becomes impatient, looking this way and that.*]

THE SHERIFF. Where is he? Why doesn't he come? If you've muddled this, my man, there's payment in Nottingham for fools.

ROBIN. Be easy, your honour. I've not muddled it, your honour. Robin Hood is here, now.

THE SHERIFF. Where? What do you mean?

[*An arrow quivers in the ground a few paces from them.*]

THE SHERIFF [*startled*]. What's that? Is that from Robin Hood?

ROBIN. No—it's from one of his friends. Robin Hood is near to you, Master Sheriff—be careful.

THE SHERIFF. Where—where?

ROBIN [*throwing off his disguise*]. As I promised, Master Sheriff.

THE SHERIFF [*after a moment's alarm*]. Take him, and the woman too.

[*Two men seize* ROBIN *and another takes* MARIAN *roughly, not without getting his ears clapped.*]

THE SHERIFF. Very sly, friend Robin, very sly, aren't you? Bring him, quickly.

ROBIN. But you wouldn't take me back to Nottingham?

THE SHERIFF. Yes, rascal, to Nottingham, and to something worse than a beating.

ROBIN. You don't say so—now lawk-a-mussy-be!

[*The men come from the wood, as before.* LITTLE JOHN *is behind a tree near to the soldier who holds* MARIAN. *He steps out and takes the soldier by the ear; the* SHERIFF *turns at the man's cry and sees that they are trapped. For a moment he and his men are dazed; then they take to their heels, running in different directions.* LITTLE JOHN *keeps his man while the others are pursued, caught, and brought back terrified.*]

ROBIN. Good. Very well contrived, eh, Master Sheriff? Ah—and here's more luck travelling this way——

[FRIAR TUCK *and his men are seen approaching, the* BALLAD SINGER *with them. Loud cheering greets them.*]

FRIAR TUCK. Good, Robin boy, you've done well and we've done no worse. Hey, lads, as bonny a ten minutes as ever a dial marked. Up I go to the gaol-gate in the dark and spoke through to the keeper, a stout fellow, well-shouldered like myself. That's the fashion of it, think I—Tuck shall keep that gate. Evening, porter, peace be on you. Evening, he answers, surly enough. I've a message, say I. What is it? I'm deaf, say I, and he opens the gate. How far is it to Zouch? That's as may be—surly again. You've a rough tongue, porter. What's that to you?—and he turns away.

Whizz—my stick on the side of his crown [*during his narrative he feints at the* SHERIFF'S *men to illustrate his meaning*] and he was good to say nothing for an hour to come. Then I slipped on his coat and his girdle of keys. In go my three lads in a twinkling and keep in a shadow. I spy a sour fellow on guard. Fetch me the ballad-singing rascal, say I, and give him the keys, and luck was with me for he knew where to pick. Back he comes with our good man there right enough. Whizz—and down goes his sourness with a growl. Out come six or seven others, not quite quick in their senses. Now then, I cry, and my lads and I are about them, and master ballad-singer lends a hand too. Whizz—whizz—whizz—and in the turning of a plough team we're out into the night and clear of Nottingham streets. In five minutes we saw their torches flaming, but east way or west way they didn't come our way.

[*He finishes to delighted cries from the crowd.*]

ROBIN. And now, Master Sheriff, for our reckoning. You shall have fair trial, Master Sheriff.

[*The outlaws sit round in a circle again.* ROBIN, FRIAR TUCK, *and* LITTLE JOHN *in the centre. The* SHERIFF *and his men, including those who were first captured, are placed as for trial, guarded.*]

ROBIN. It is said that you are cruel, abusing the power that the King gives you. What do you say?

THE SHERIFF. That you are an insolent pack of knaves.

ROBIN. Hoity-toity. You, ballad man—what have you to say?

THE BALLAD SINGER. I sang in the street good songs, and I harmed nobody. And the folk liked my songs and were friendly. And he, for some black spite in him that rails against a good song, had me beaten and thrown like dirt into a mouldy cell. And a man who hates a good song is no fit man to hold a King's power.

[*There are cries of assent.*]

ROBIN. And you, father pedlar?

THE PEDLAR. A good song is a sweet thing, and I love it and love all makers of good songs. And when I saw this fellow taken like a felon for the song on his lips, I spoke my mind. And this Sheriff had me beaten and thrown out. And the King who gave this Sheriff his shift of authority would do well by any man who made good songs and by any who spoke for just dealing. And the King's power has been abused by this musty-veined jack-in-office, and I say it.

[*Cries of assent again.*]

THE SHERIFF. So a scurvy beggar and tatter-wits is to put the King's Sheriff to rights! And what's that he's got on his head?

LITTLE JOHN. A plaything that he found, Master Sheriff.

THE SHERIFF. Stole.

ROBIN. Maybe—never mind that. This man is accused of cruelty and abuse of his office. Is he found guilty?

[*Cries of* "Yes, guilty," *from the outlaws.*]

ROBIN. There are many old scores, Master Sheriff, and this shall pay for all. What is the penalty?

THE PEDLAR. May that be mine to say?

ROBIN. Yours?

THE PEDLAR. For a whim. I can devise well in this.

ROBIN. What do you say? Shall we humour him?

ALL. Yes, let the Pedlar say.

THE SHERIFF. There shall be a blight on you all for this. You set a beggar to pronounce on the King's Sheriff! The King's swords shall sweep you out of the land for this—setting a low thieving beggar to brag it over the honourable Sheriff of a loyal city of the King. There shall be whips and halters, I promise you.

THE PEDLAR. Easily, Master Sheriff, easily. This were a good time to give a civil gate to your words.

THE SHERIFF. What, brazen-face—you to dare to speak so to the King's Sheriff.

THE PEDLAR. The King's Sheriff? No, surely. The King would keep no Sheriff to beat good honest folk and whip a man for singing.

THE SHERIFF. Here's fine talk for a beggar—the King would this and the King would that indeed! But the King's justice shall teach him.

THE PEDLAR. The King shall be his own justice.

[*He throws his pedlar's cloak off, and* RICHARD CŒUR DE LION *stands before them. All kneel and cheer.*]

THE SHERIFF [*prostrating himself*]. Your majesty—your majesty—[*his terror will allow him to get no further*].

RICHARD. Get up, man. You're a knave, but crawling won't mend it.

THE SHERIFF [*getting up, shaking*]. Does any one know of your majesty's return?

RICHARD. I had a humour to come unknown and to watch my people, common folk and my deputies and outlawed men alike, quietly, over their shoulders. Good amusement. Profitable too—full of strange instruction. And a beating thrown in. [*The* SHERIFF *sinks at the King's feet again.*] There, man, get up I tell you. That shall not count in the reckoning—I've limbs can take more than your fellows gave—it's well for them I remembered my part or there would have been broken heads among them.

THE SHERIFF. Mercy, mercy, mercy——

RICHARD. You shall make sport for us. You have betrayed a great trust; you have misused a friendly decent fellow; you have taught your underlings your own nasty manners; you have put dishonour on a good song. Very well. Robin Hood—Friar Tuck—Little John, come here. There are nine men. Can you settle with three apiece?

LITTLE JOHN. I'll settle with the whole fry of them myself, your majesty, if you'll give me leave.

RICHARD. No, three apiece. And for you, Sir Sheriff, you're a coward. None of these fellows

can be asked to fight a coward. Marian girl, can you hold a staff?

ROBIN. That she can, your majesty.

RICHARD. Would you beat a knave, girl?

MARIAN. Readily, your majesty.

RICHARD. Then beat that one.

[*Quarter-staves are brought and a great ring is formed.* ROBIN, FRIAR TUCK, *and* LITTLE JOHN *engage three men apiece and* MARIAN *the* SHERIFF. *There is wild cheering and excitement, as one by one the* SHERIFF'S *men fall bruised and exhausted. The* SHERIFF *and* MARIAN *are left, and all attention goes to them until at last* MARIAN *beats him to the ground amid roars of delight.*

As the SHERIFF *and his men gather themselves up painfully.*]

RICHARD. You have paid, and you are pardoned. I charge all to say nothing of this morning's work. If any tale of misdeeds reaches me again, Master, Nottingham shall hear of Maid Marian.

THE SHERIFF. No, not that——

RICHARD. Then look to your behaviour, Master Sheriff. Robin—you and your men henceforth are free men to do as you will.

ROBIN. Sire, we would change our life for no man's. Let us be your majesty's loyal subjects here in the open world that we love.

RICHARD. As you will. [*The men kneel in allegiance.*] I go now to London. Will you see me on my way?

ROBIN. As far as your majesty consents.

[*He calls out a dozen of his men and they form a bodyguard.*]

RICHARD. You [*giving the* BALLAD SINGER *a ring*], singer, wear this from Richard in token of his will that you come and go to your own moods. And the King will make you a good audience when the road brings you to London.

THE BALLAD SINGER. Sire, I will make you a song for this, as proud a song as a good King should have.

RICHARD. And a song before I go. I'll have the one I heard by Trent side.

[*The* BALLAD SINGER *sings, all repeating verses after him.*]

I ask no store of common gear
Who never unrewarded went
Along the twilit fields to hear
The thrushes calling over Trent,
Who carry in my pocket still
A penny piece for courtesy,
If any man would stay to fill
A comfortable cup with me.

I have no falcon on my wrist
Nor any beakers made of gold,
But lips as kind as any kissed
Are mine to kiss, and mine to mould
In shapes imperishably fair
The brain's tumultuous beating throng,
The wonder of the world I snare
In shining nets of love and song.

[*During the song a number of country girls come on,*

dancing among the singers who are seated, and joining in the song. The song ends.]

RICHARD. Well sung, and merry days to you all. [*The* SHERIFF *and his men go back towards Nottingham, and the* KING *sets out with his bodyguard to a great shouting from all. The men and girls sing through the chorus of the song as they go back to the greenwood.*]

From "Collected Plays."

THE RIDDLE

A PLEASANT PASTORAL COMEDY

Adapted from "The Wife of Bath's Tale" as it is set forth in the Works of Master Geoffrey Chaucer

PRESENTED AT OTTERSPOOL ON MIDSUMMER EVE, 1895

Written by WALTER RALEIGH

TO THE

FIRST WOMAN

Mother Eve,

Thou who didſt not blench at the firſt queſtion propounded in the Garden of Paradise, which was asked by the Devil and answered by thee ; who gaveſt to man of the Tree, not as the dotage of certain Rabbinical commentators doth allege, of the twigs of the Hazel, but rather of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and he did eat ; who, in the cool of the day, didſt hide thyself amongſt the trees of the garden ; to the memory of thy Speculative Intrepidity, of thy Private and Familiar Generosity, and of thy Dislike of Public Fame, this Riddle, wherein the taſtes of thy numerous and worthy poſterity of daughters are inveſtigated and unravelled, is dedicated with remote veneration by thy degenerate Great Grandson

The Author.

PERSONS OF THE COMEDY

KING ARTHUR, *King of Britain.*

SIR PHARAMOND, *a Knight of King Arthur's Court.*

SIR CALEPINE, *his friend.*

SIR PARIDELL, *a Knight newly returned from Foreign Courts.*

SIR GOLIAS, *a fat, thirsty Knight.*

SIR EGLAMOUR, *an affected foppish Knight.*

THE COURT JESTER.

A HERALD, KNIGHTS, ATTENDANTS, FALCONERS, etc.

THE QUEEN.

AN OLD WOMAN, *afterwards transformed, in love with* SIR PHARAMOND.

LADIES *of King Arthur's Court.*

FAIRIES, ELVES, *and other Good People.*

THE RIDDLE

WALTER RALEIGH

THE SCENE: *A Woodland Glade. The noise of horns is heard. Enter a company of Knights,* SIR CALEPINE, SIR PARIDELL, SIR GOLIAS, SIR EGLAMOUR, *and others, with attendants, and the* COURT JESTER.

[*The Knights sit in a group and drink;* CALEPINE *and* PARIDELL *walk to and fro, talking.*]

PARIDELL. Is this the place?

CALEPINE. It is, I know it well.
'Twas on this very spot, Sir Paridell,
The king gave judgement, in full audience,
That Pharamond should die.

PARIDELL. And what offence
Had he committed?

CALEPINE. Falsely he defamed
A noble lady; all his heart inflamed
With jealousy, they said, for she had turned
A cold ear to the love wherein he burned;
Yet in the verdict none could find a flaw,
His head was forfeit by King Arthur's law.

PARIDELL. Lo, I have lived in courts of many a king
And many an emperor, but ne'er this thing
Have I beheld, that sentence should be passed,
And not made good; far otherwise, as fast
As the King spake in wrath the fatal word
The headsman plied his axe. Who ever heard

Of execution thus remote? You say
The Court was held a year ago to-day.

CALEPINE. When the King's doom was given, our gracious Queen
And all her ladies knelt upon this green,
And begged the offender's life, that it should be
Delivered over to their lenity.
Their prayer was granted; then the Queen uprose
The sentence of her ladies to disclose,
And respited his life a single year
If he would come to-day and answer here
The question that they set him; which was this,
WHEREIN DO WOMEN FIND THEIR GREATEST BLISS?
This well might puzzle sages, 'twas beyond
The simple wit of poor Sir Pharamond.
He left the court and wandered far afield,
To try if travel might fresh wisdom yield.
To-day must he give answer, and abide
The test that shall his death or life decide.
His tardiness bodes ill.

GOLIAS. Ye argue long,
This noble company demands a song.

KNIGHTS. A song! A song! A song!

GOLIAS. A song of mirth;
By'r Lady, there is grief enough on earth.

THE SONG

May he be hanged high on a tree,
Or fast bound to a post,
He that will not merry, merry be,
With a generous bowl and toast.

Chorus

Let him be merry, merry, merry there,
And we will be merry, merry here,
For who can know
Where we may go
To be merry another year,
Brave boys,
To be merry another year?

He that will not merry, merry be,
With a company of jolly boys,
May he be plagued with a scolding wife,
To confound him with her noise.

Chorus

Let him be merry, etc.

GOLIAS. Is not this better than your mumping talk?

CALEPINE. The birds cease singing when they see the hawk;
Death hovers o'er us, poising on the wing,
Who knows where he may strike?

GOLIAS. Then drink and sing!
Perchance Sir Pharamond has found a clue
To this same riddle, and will answer true.
So warm with wine your thoughts that grief benumbs;
Care killed a cat!

KNIGHTS. See, where he comes! He comes!
[*Enter* SIR PHARAMOND, *travel-stained and weary. He salutes the company.*]

CALEPINE. I dare not bid thee welcome, till I hear
How thou'rt attended, whether Hope or Fear
Hath shown thy wandering ſteps the homeward way.
What issue had thy errand? Quickly, say.

PHARAMOND. Comfortless, hopeless. Though a man should run
From the bright orient to the setting sun,
And put this queſtion unto all he meets,
'Twere the moſt profitless of idle feats.
I have travelled from the great *Mongolian* plain
To where the *Atlantic* bounds the realm of *Spain*,
From *Barbary* to snow-bound *Aſtrachan*,
And here I end as wise as I began.
I have asked them, sage and simple, rich and poor,
Chriſtian and *Turk*, the *Scythian* and the *Moor*,
The Cham of *Tartary* and Preſter *John*
What women moſt do set their hearts upon;
And each made answer gladly, with a show
Of telling secrets he alone did know.
At firſt this pleased me well; but, woe is me,
No pair of answers ever did agree.
So here I ſtand, undone, discomfited,
Teasing my wits in vain to save my head.

JESTER. Now, a plague on this game of joyous demands, that sends a gentleman coursing round the world like a greyhound after a swallow! A man were better to ſtay at home and teach ducks to quack at his funeral.

PARIDELL. Among so many answers could you find
None to bring hope of comfort to your mind?
Your travelled observation should impart
Skill to descry the secrets of the heart.

JESTER. Perchance Sir Knight of the sorrowful visage has travelled much and seen little, like Sir *Jonas* of old time in the belly of the whale, who spent the greater part of his observation in observing the pitiful fix he was in.

CALEPINE. Some answer must be given; let us unite
Our efforts, haply we may guess aright.

PHARAMOND. Lend me your wits, my own are at a stand.
What shall I say?

1ST KNIGHT. Rich husbands!

2ND KNIGHT. Dresses!

3RD KNIGHT. Land!

JESTER. The Ten Commandments!

PARIDELL. Praise for secrecy!

CALEPINE. A pound of truth and tons of flattery!

PHARAMOND. Ah, miserable counsel! Had ye said
That they desire a man should lose his head
For their fair sakes, 'twere nearer to the mark.

EGLAMOUR. It seems to me ye all are in the dark;
Will no one ask my counsel?

PHARAMOND. That will I.
Sir Eglamour, what think you?
[EGLAMOUR *pauses, looks wise, and struts about.*]
Be not shy!
My life stands on the hazard.

EGLAMOUR. What think you?
This cloak is not ill-cut—the cap is new,
A fancy of my own, designed in *France*,
I think it has some little elegance.

PHARAMOND. May rust and moth consume thy trashy gear
For sporting thus with death! What help is here?

JESTER. Fie, fie, gaffer! Take a lesson in civility from King *Caradoc*, who, eating oysters with the *Pope* on Ash Wednesday, when he came to a bad oyster made no wry faces, but fell to praising the shells. Curse not the feathers because the flesh is rank! Mew! We can have no more of the cat but her skin!

EGLAMOUR. Do you not take my meaning? Force me not
To be immodest!

PHARAMOND. Tell thy meaning, sot!

JESTER. The meaning of Sir Eglamour is like the quality of modesty, the more you talk of it, the less there is. 'Tis ill looking for eggs in a mare's nest!

EGLAMOUR. Give ear to me a moment, Sir Knight, and if I may do it without presumption, I will tell you how you may save your life. When the Queen and all her ladies are set, and the question put to you, as thus, What do women love best? or wherein do they take their chief delight? or what is their greatest pleasure? then you, standing silent like a baffled man at a loss for an answer, must ever gaze on me, and I, stepping forward, will smile upon the Queen,

as thus [*smiling fantastically*], then will the Queen and all her ladies blush to be caught thinking of me. This long while it hath been matter for amazement how they dote on me. Then you still gazing on me, and I still smiling——

PHARAMOND. Take thyself off, Sir Fop, or I shall beat thee inordinately!

JESTER. Nay, gaffer, soft words! What says the proverb—*Better kiss a fool than be troubled by him?* This poor Sir Eglamour is ambitious of my calling, but he is young at the business.

EGLAMOUR. Beating, say you? 'Tis a tyrannical world when a man must be beaten for telling the truth from motives of sheer human kindness. Beating, forsooth! Alack-a-daisy! Never talk to me of beating!

[*Exit.*]

JESTER. This is a pleasant graveyard, gaffer, but the butterflies will not stay in it.

PHARAMOND. Now my sad remnant of existence wanes,
Grief blurs my thoughts, and deadly peril drains
My life-blood from me and confounds my sense:
Give aid, my friends, concoct some poor defence.

CALEPINE. We have argued high and low, our bolt is shot;
Some wizard only could untie this knot.
[*To* GOLIAS] My hawk sights quarry, he begins to tower,
The Court holds sessions in another hour.

GOLIAS. Some wizard? Now there comes into my thought
One gleam of comfort for a wit distraught.
Do they not call this lawn the *Fairies'* glade?

CALEPINE. 'Tis so. The country yokels are afraid
To pass by night lest *Mab* and all her crew
Should capture them and pinch them black and blue,
Or prison them in dungeons underground
For seven long years, then loose them to be found
Asleep where first their steps were led astray;
And ever on the high Midsummer Day
The fairies hold full revel, in broad light,
Then, so the legend goes, the happy wight
Who sees them dance and breaks the magic ring,
May force their Queen to grant him anything
That he demands——

GOLIAS. Look up, the sun rides high;
'Tis the Midsummer solstice, let us try
This last forlorn device; if we give place,
Sir Pharamond may find the fairies' grace.
Come then, Sir Knights, away!

CALEPINE. These old wives' tales
Are broken reeds to trust, yet nought avails
That we can do. Then, Pharamond, good speed!
Heaven send the fairies help thee at thy need!

[*The* KNIGHTS *go out.* PHARAMOND *stands lost in thought.*]

JESTER. Who was the first man, gaffer?

PHARAMOND. Gad-fly, what dost thou here?

JESTER. Nothing, gaffer, but that I thought it was the fashion to ask riddles. Do thou answer

me, 'twill get thee into the habit. I will begin with an easy one, and draw thee to perfection by degrees. Be not angry—who was the first man?

PHARAMOND. Thou art a good priest, fool, and dost stablish me in religious knowledge by way of shrift. Was it not *Adam*?

JESTER. I know not. Who was the first woman?

PHARAMOND. Eve.

JESTER. And what was *Eve's* straw hat made of? There is a harder one, and so we lift the novice higher.

PHARAMOND. Fool, thou troublest me. Leave me.

JESTER. I feared thou would'st not know what *Eve's* straw hat was made of. 'Tis a question in millinery, wherein thou art no expert, for thou knowest neither what is on women's heads nor what is in them. But thou must persevere, we shall have thee a scholar ere long. Be not surly, gaffer, let me help thee.

PHARAMOND. And how does thy miserable folly help my foolish misery?

JESTER. Bravely, gaffer; if folly were not to lend a hand to wisdom, neither of them two would ever get to *Tewkesbury*. Now *Eve's* straw hat was made of straw, take that from my folly; and what women do most desire is to be desired, save that for thine own wisdom. For there is no woman, be she young, be she fair, but doth secretly rejoice and chuck unto herself to be gazed upon with the eye of affection.

PHARAMOND [*throwing himself on the grass*]. Away, fool, away!
Must thy babble be the last sound in my ears?

JESTER. Good-night, gaffer! Sleep not too long, lest the fairies clap an ass's head on thee and give the Separator trouble to determine whether he is cutting the body off a donkey or the head off a man.

Here comes a candle to light thee to bed
And here comes a chopper to chop off the head
Of the last, last, last, last man.

[*Exit.*]

[*Enter the* OLD WOMAN, *dishevelled and hobbling. She takes her stand in the middle of the lawn and turns thrice, weaving magic circles with her staff. She whistles; the fairies creep out from the wood, at first one by one, then in troops, and surround her.*]

A Dance of Fairies

[*The fairies vanish.* PHARAMOND *approaches, and crosses the ring. The* OLD WOMAN *rises and speaks.*]

OLD WOMAN. What seek'st thou here, Sir Knight, by whose command
Com'st thou to break the peace of fairy land?
This lawn is sacred to the Queen of Fays,
Take warning, save thy life, and go thy ways.

PHARAMOND. Fair speech, good mother, to a desperate man!
My life is forfeit 'neath King Arthur's ban.
I've wandered o'er the world to pay my debt,
And paid it will be, ere the sun shall set.
Call back your goblins, let them do their worst.

OLD WOMAN. Do thou give answer to my question first.
What brings thee here?

PHARAMOND. It seems the common cry,
Answer my question, or at once you die.—
Nay, lady, spare an overburdened mind.
I seek an answer that I cannot find
To no such easy question as you ask;
Answer *my* question were the worthy task
For witches or for seers.

OLD WOMAN. Propound it, son!

PHARAMOND. And idly cater for the elvish fun
Of all your dancing brood! Here lies my way,
The headsman's axe yields better comfort.

OLD WOMAN. Stay!
Truth dwelt in woodlands in the Age of Gold,
And years bring cunning with them; trust the old!
Three hundred springs have laughed upon the leas,
Three hundred summers faded from the trees,
Since I was young with youth's simplicity.
Who knows but I may help thee?—tell it me.

PHARAMOND. In very truth, good mother, here it is:
I am a dead man if I tell amiss
Before King Arthur's court, this day convened,
The answer to the riddle of a fiend—
What thing is that which women most desire?
To cut this knot have I dared flood and fire,
Through many a court and many a continent,
Yet still have I returned the way I went,

Unhelped by clown or courtier, fool or knave.
If, by thy magic art, thou now canſt save
My name from smirch, my body from despite,
My lands and fees shall all be thine of right.

OLD WOMAN. Plight me thy hand in mine, and promise me
That anything I may require of thee
Thou wilt perform it, be it in thy power,
And I will save thee ere another hour.

PHARAMOND. Here is my hand, I swear with all goodwill!

OLD WOMAN. Then I may boaſt, for all thy little skill,
Thy life is safe, for I will ſtand thereby.
The Queen herself will say the same as I,
And not the proudeſt lady of her court
Will dare to contradict thy true report;
The silence of them, widow, maid, and wife,
Shall prove my wisdom and preserve thy life.
Let us go forth at once, and in thine ear
The answer shall be told. Away with fear!

[*Exeunt.*]

[*The Court of* KING ARTHUR *enters, preceded by* TRUMPETERS, *the* KING *and* QUEEN, *then the* LADIES, *then the* KNIGHTS. *The* KING *and* QUEEN *are seated together, the* LADIES *of the court as assessors on either side, the* KNIGHTS *ſtand grouped on either side.*]

HERALD. OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ! This is the Court of King Arthur!

All wild beaſts and creeping things are ſtraitly

charged in the name of our Sovran Lord the King to leave the court! All birds, dragons, and other flying things are forbidden, under pain of death, to fly over the court while our liege Lord and Lady are in session. Let all those persons who have matters to transact before the court, and all those who are bound over to appear this day before our Sovran Lord the King or our Sovran Lady the Queen, now stand forward!

OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ! This is the Court of King Arthur!

[SIR PHARAMOND *enters and stands before the* KING *and* QUEEN, *facing them: the* KNIGHTS *give way on either hand.*]

PHARAMOND. My Sovran Lord, my Lady without peer,
Ye noble Dames that are assembled here,
Maidens, that in the seat of judgement sit
By virtue of your gentleness and wit,
Wives, whom true faith empowers, and widows, ye
Whom old experience hath taught subtlety,
Lo, I have held my day; and here I stand,
For judgement at my Sovran Lady's hand.

HERALD. OYEZ! OYEZ! OYEZ! Let all that are in the Court keep silence, that the cause between our Sovran Lady the Queen and Sir Pharamond may be well and truly tried!

QUEEN. Read him the question from the Rolls of State,
According to his answer is his fate.

HERALD [*unrolls a large parchment and reads*].

THE COURT HEREBY DECREES THAT TWELVE MONTHS HENCE
SIR PHARAMOND SHALL TELL IN AUDIENCE,
WHAT WOMEN MOST DO SET THEIR HEARTS UPON.

Give answer truly, for the year is gone.

PHARAMOND. My gracious Lady, universally,
Women desire to have sovereignty,
And to be absolute in power above
The men they sway, in policy or love.
This is the utmost goal of their desire.
Take now my life, if justice do require.

QUEEN. How say you, ladies, has he spoken true?
What, none deny it? You, nor you, nor you?
Shall this blunt answer expiate his guilt?
Or shall his life upon this place be spilt?

1ST LADY. Absolve him!

2ND LADY. Quit him!

3RD LADY. Spare the brazen-face!

1ST LADY. Pardon the ribald!

2ND LADY. Pity!

3RD LADY. Mercy!

ALL THE LADIES. Grace!

QUEEN. You see, Sir Knight, these ladies plead for you,
Perchance (I know not) thou hast spoken true.
Howbeit, we spare thy life. Let it be seen
Thou knowest to prize the mercy of thy Queen.

PHARAMOND [*kneeling*]. My gracious Lady, in all lowliness,
Saved by thy puissance from my black distress,
I thank and praise thee ; [*rising*] now as free as air
Joyful I take my leave.

OLD WOMAN [*coming forward with uplifted arm*]. Hold, stop him there !

1ST LADY. Who is this person ?

2ND LADY. Shocking !

3RD LADY. Turn her out !

OLD WOMAN. Justice, my liege ! 'Twas I that solved his doubt.
The answer that the noble Court has heard
And has approved, I taught him, every word.

1ST LADY. Odious old scrub !

2ND LADY. Her finger in the pie !

3RD LADY. Not nice !

1ST LADY. I wish we'd killed him !

2ND LADY. So do I !

3RD LADY. If some one doesn't stop her, I shall faint !

OLD WOMAN. Give ear, my lady Queen, to my complaint !
This man has pledged to me his knightly oath
That whatsoe'er I ask him, nothing loth
He will perform, if it be in his power.
And now before the Court, this very hour,
Sir Knight, I pray thee, take me for thy wife,
For well thou knowest I have saved thy life.
Do I speak true or false ?

PHARAMOND. Alas! too true!
That was the promise that I gave to you—
Fool that I am! But, lady, think again,
Make me not thus the wretchedest of men.
For love of Heaven choose some new request,
Take all my goods, or what you fancy best
Of lands or tenements; 'twere ill to save
A man from death and wed him to the grave.

OLD WOMAN. My mind is fixed, not all that thou canst do
Will change it;—judge, O Queen, betwixt us two!
Lo! here I stand to vindicate my claim.
What does he see in me that he can blame?
I saved his life, does that deserve his hate?
Why am I deemed unworthy for his mate?
If I have faults they may in time amend.

QUEEN. Sir Knight, give answer.

HERALD. Let the Court attend!

PHARAMOND. O Queen, my word is passed, and I will keep
The hasty vow I made. Yet silly sheep
Led to the slaughter are not asked to praise
The butcher's knife in many a glozing phrase.
Pardon my frankness, therefore, if I call
This beldame old and poor and therewithal
Ugly extremely, and of base degree.
Are these defects that may amended be?

1ST LADY. Here is a gentle wooer.

2ND LADY. Does he well
Rashly to cheapen what he cannot sell?

3RD LADY. I like his plainness.

HERALD. Silence in the Court!

PHARAMOND. My answer, therefore, lady Queen, is short,
I hate her, and will marry her to-day.

OLD WOMAN. Now let me speak, O Queen, and I will say
My answer to the charges that he brings.
First, I am poor; they say the poor man sings
Even when he meets with robbers on the road;
And poverty hath ever been a goad
To honourable toil, a happy test
Whereby true friends are sifted from the rest;
Yea, a man learns, by poverty brought low,
Not his friends only, but himself to know.
And is not merry poverty as good
As groaning 'neath a cumbrous livelihood?
But I am old, he saith; should that not be
A reason for redoubled courtesy?
Wisdom and prudence are the wealth of age,
If youth would but accept the heritage.
Once more, I am the object of his scorn
Because I fortune to be lowly born.
Ah, if a Nobleman could but devise
A means to leave his virtue when he dies
Tied up with all his titles and estate,
Then were nobility of higher rate;
But if a noble's son do churlish deeds,
And flout the hand that helps him in his needs,
He is not gentle, be he Duke or Earl,
For base ungrateful actions make a churl.

Lastly, I am displeasing to the eye,
But many excellences come thereby.
Think of the famous women of old time,
Shrined in true history or poet's rhyme,
For whom the direst wicked deeds were done:
They all were Queens of beauty, every one.
Whole empires have been shattered, cities sacked,
And busy valleys left a lifeless tract,
Millions of men have perished for the kiss
Of *Cleopatra* or *Semiramis;*
Yet still in beauty take ye childish joy,
Remembering *Helen*, but forgetting *Troy*.
Nay, look on me with gladness; for this face
No towns shall burn, no champions court disgrace,
No kings shall agonize in mad despair,
Nor screams of widowed women rend the air.
Deceit here is not: what I am, I seem,
No painter's fantasy nor poet's dream:
The homely virtues, proper to the shade,
Dwell in this face and flourish undismayed.
Yet, lest this knight, O Queen, should curse his hap,
And taunt me that I caught him in a trap,
I can again employ the magic lore
Whereby I rescued him from death before.
Let him now choose if he will have his wife
Virtuous and faithful to him all her life,
But old and all uncomely; or endowed
With matchless beauty, but of spirit proud,
Peevish and fickle, skilled in every wile,
Charming and faithless, beautiful and vile.
For one of these two let him give his voice,
And he shall have the lady of his choice.

[PHARAMOND *sighs, and falls into a brown study.*]

QUEEN. The offer is a fair one. Come, Sir Knight.

PHARAMOND. O, gracious Queen, thou seest to what a plight
I am reduced; full well may I repine,
Squalor or wickedness must needs be mine.
Yet since this lady hath by fate been sent
To be my succour and admonishment,
I fain would have my sentence make it plain
That all her lesson has not been in vain.
Lady, I will not choose; but do protest
That I approve whiche'er to you seems best.
Do as you please, and I am satisfied.

OLD WOMAN. Then do you utterly renounce your pride,
And here submit to my authority?

PHARAMOND. I do.

OLD WOMAN. Now have I gained the victory:
Look up, be joyful, cast away despair,
And you shall have a bride both good and fair.
[*The* OLD WOMAN *throws off her cloak and appears transformed. Sensation in the Court.*]

QUEEN. Take her, Sir Knight, and let this day be spent
In feasting, revelry, and merriment.

KING. Strike up the music! Though we are a King,
Our rule is brief, and frail, and wavering,
Compared with that great Sovranty whose sway
Hath been established in our Court to-day.

This night shall be resigned to mirth and sport,
In honour of the despots of our Court.
Ye Knights, take each your lady by the hand,
And modestly submit to her command.
In full procession to the palace go ;
Ourselves will lead you. Let the trumpets blow !

From "Laughter from a Cloud."

THE TRAVELLING MAN

A MIRACLE PLAY

LADY GREGORY

THE TRAVELLING MAN[1]

A MIRACLE PLAY

LADY GREGORY

PERSONS

A MOTHER
A CHILD
A TRAVELLING MAN

SCENE: *A cottage kitchen. A woman setting out a bowl and jug and board on the table for breadmaking.*

CHILD. What is it you are going to make, mother?

MOTHER. I am going to make a grand cake with white flour. Seeds I will put in it. Maybe I'll make a little cake for yourself too. You can be baking it in the little pot while the big one will be baking in the big pot.

CHILD. It is a pity daddy to be away at the fair on a Samhain night.

MOTHER. I must make my feast all the same, for Samhain night is more to me than to any other one. It was on this night seven years I first came into this house.

CHILD. You will be taking down those plates from the dresser so, those plates with flowers on them, and be putting them on the table.

[1] Application for the right of performing this play or reading it in public should be made to Samuel French, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

MOTHER. I will. I will set out the house to-day, and bring down the best delf, and put whatever thing is best on the table, because of the great thing that happened me seven years ago.

CHILD. What great thing was that?

MOTHER. I was after being driven out of the house where I was a serving girl. . . .

CHILD. Where was that house? Tell me about it.

MOTHER [*sitting down and pointing southward*]. It is over there I was living, in a farmer's house up on Slieve Echtge, near to Slieve na n-Or, the Golden Mountain.

CHILD. The Golden Mountain! That must be a grand place.

MOTHER. Not very grand indeed, but bare and cold enough at that time of the year. Anyway, I was driven out a Samhain day like this, because of some things that were said against me.

CHILD. What did you do then?

MOTHER. What had I to do but to go walking the bare bog road through the rough hills where there was no shelter to find, and the sharp wind going through me, and the red mud heavy on my shoes. I came to Kilbecanty. . . .

CHILD. I know Kilbecanty. That is where the woman in the shop gave me sweets out of a bottle.

MOTHER. So she might now, but that night her door was shut and all the doors were shut; and I

saw through the windows the boys and the girls sitting round the hearth and playing their games, and I had no courage to ask for shelter. In dread I was they might think some shameful thing of me, and I going the road alone in the night-time.

CHILD. Did you come here after that?

MOTHER. I went on down the hill in the darkness, and with the dint of my trouble and the length of the road my strength failed me, and I had like to fall. So I did fall at the last, meeting with a heap of broken stones by the roadside.

CHILD. I hurt my knee one time I fell on the stones.

MOTHER. It was then the great thing happened. I saw a stranger coming towards me, a very tall man, the best I ever saw, bright and shining that you could see him through the darkness; and I knew him to be no common man.

CHILD. Who was he?

MOTHER. It is what I thought, that he was the King of the World.

CHILD. Had he a crown like a King?

MOTHER. If he had, it was made of the twigs of a bare blackthorn; but in his hand he had a green branch, that never grew on a tree of this world. He took me by the hand, and he led me over the stepping-stones outside to this door, and he bade me to go in and I would find good shelter. I was kneeling down to thank him, but he raised me up and he said, "I will come to see you some

other time. And do not shut up your heart in the things I give you," he said, "but have a welcome before me."

CHILD. Did he go away then?

MOTHER. I saw him no more after that, but I did as he bade me. [*She stands up and goes to the door.*] I came in like this, and your father was sitting there by the hearth, a lonely man that was after losing his wife. He was alone and I was alone, and we married one another; and I never wanted since for shelter or safety. And a good wife I made him, and a good housekeeper.

CHILD. Will the King come again to the house?

MOTHER. I have his word for it he will come, but he did not come yet; it is often your father and myself looked out the door of a Samhain night, thinking to see him.

CHILD. I hope he won't come in the night-time, and I asleep.

MOTHER. It is of him I do be thinking every year, and I setting out the house, and making a cake for the supper.

CHILD. What will he do when he comes in?

MOTHER. He will sit over there in the chair, and maybe he will taste a bit of the cake. I will call in all the neighbours; I will tell them he is here. They will not be keeping it in their mind against me then that I brought nothing, coming to the house. They will know I am before any of them, the time they know who it is has come to

visit me. They will all kneel down and ask for his blessing. But the best blessing will be on the house he came to of himself.

CHILD. And are you going to make the cake now?

MOTHER. I must make it now indeed, or I will be late with it. I am late as it is; I was expecting one of the neighbours to bring me white flour from the town. I'll wait no longer, I'll go borrow it in some place. There will be a wedding in the stone-cutter's house Thursday, it's likely there will be flour in the house.

CHILD. Let me go along with you.

MOTHER. It is best for you to stop here. Be a good child now, and don't be meddling with the things on the table. Sit down there by the hearth and break up those little sticks I am after bringing in. Make a little heap of them now before me, and we will make a good fire to bake the cake. See now how many will you break. Don't go out the door while I'm away, I would be in dread of you going near the river and it in flood. Behave yourself well now. Be counting the sticks as you break them.

[*She goes out.*]

CHILD [*sitting down and breaking sticks across his knee*]. One—and two—O I can break this one into a great many, one, two, three, four.—This one is wet—I don't like a wet one—five, six—that is a great heap. —Let me try that great big one.—That is too hard.—

I don't think mother could break that one.—Daddy could break it.

[*Half-door is opened and a* TRAVELLING MAN *comes in. He wears a ragged white flannel shirt, and mud-stained trousers. He is bareheaded and barefooted, and carries a little branch in his hand.*]

TRAVELLING MAN [*stooping over the* CHILD *and taking the stick*]. Give it here to me and hold this.

[*He puts the branch in the* CHILD'S *hand while he takes the stick and breaks it.*]

CHILD. That is a good branch, apples on it and flowers. The tree at the mill has apples yet, but all the flowers are gone. Where did you get this branch?

TRAVELLING MAN. I got it in a garden a long way off.

CHILD. Where is the garden? Where do you come from?

TRAVELLING MAN [*pointing southward*]. I have come from beyond those hills.

CHILD. It is from the Golden Mountain you are come? From Slieve na n-Or?

TRAVELLING MAN. That is where I come from surely, from the Golden Mountain. I would like to sit down and rest for a while.

CHILD. Sit down here beside me. We must not go near the table or touch anything, or mother will be angry. Mother is going to make a beautiful cake, a cake that will be fit for a King that might be coming in to our supper.

TRAVELLING MAN. I will sit here with you on the floor.

[*Sits down.*]

CHILD. Tell me now about the Golden Mountain.

TRAVELLING MAN. There is a garden in it, and there is a tree in the garden that has fruit and flowers at the one time.

CHILD. Like this branch?

TRAVELLING MAN. Just like that little branch.

CHILD. What other things are in the garden?

TRAVELLING MAN. There are birds of all colours that sing at every hour, the way the people will come to their prayers. And there is a high wall about the garden.

CHILD. What way can the people get through the wall?

TRAVELLING MAN. There are four gates in the wall: a gate of gold, and a gate of silver, and a gate of crystal, and a gate of white brass.

CHILD [*taking up the sticks*]. I will make a garden. I will make a wall with these sticks.

TRAVELLING MAN. This big stick will make the first wall.

[*They build a square wall with sticks.*]

CHILD [*taking up branch*]. I will put this in the middle. This is the tree. I will get something to make it stand up. [*Gets up and looks at dresser.*] I can't reach it, get up and give me that shining jug.

[TRAVELLING MAN *gets up and gives him the jug.*]

TRAVELLING MAN. Here it is for you.

CHILD [*puts it within the walls and sets the branch in it*]. Tell me something else that is in the garden?

TRAVELLING MAN. There are four wells of water in it, that are as clear as glass.

CHILD. Get me down those cups, those flowery cups, we will put them for wells. [*He hands them down.*] Now I will make the gates, give me those plates for gates, not those ugly ones, those nice ones at the top.

[*He takes them down and they put them on the four sides for gates. The* CHILD *gets up and looks at it.*]

TRAVELLING MAN. There now, it is finished.

CHILD. Is it as good as the other garden? How can we go to the Golden Mountain to see the other garden?

TRAVELLING MAN. We can ride to it.

CHILD. But we have no horse.

TRAVELLING MAN. This form will be our horse. [*He draws a form out of the corner, and sits down astride on it, putting the child before him.*] Now, off we go! [*Sings, the child repeating the refrain*]—

Come ride and ride to the garden,
Come ride and ride with a will:
For the flower comes with the fruit there
Beyond a hill and a hill.

Refrain

Come ride and ride to the garden,
Come ride like the March wind;
There's barley there, and water there,
And stabling to your mind.

TRAVELLING MAN. How did you like that ride, little horseman?

CHILD. Go on again! I want another ride!

TRAVELLING MAN [*sings*]—

The Archangels stand in a row there
And all the garden bless,
The Archangel Axel, Victor the angel
Work at the cider press.

Refrain

Come ride and ride to the garden, etc.

CHILD. We will soon be at the Golden Mountain now. Ride again. Sing another song.

TRAVELLING MAN [*sings*]—

O scent of the broken apples!
O shuffling of holy shoes!
Beyond a hill and a hill there
In the land that no one knows.

Refrain

Come ride and ride to the garden, etc.

CHILD. Now another ride.

TRAVELLING MAN This will be the last. It will be a good ride.

[*The* MOTHER *comes in. She stares for a second, then throws down her basket and snatches up the* CHILD.]

MOTHER. Did ever anyone see the like of that! A common beggar, a travelling man off the roads, to be holding the child! To be leaving his ragged arms about him as if he was of his own sort! Get out of that, whoever you are, and quit this house or I'll call to some that will make you quit it.

CHILD. Do not send him out! He is not a bad man; he is a good man; he was playing horses with me. He has grand songs.

MOTHER. Let him get away out of this now, himself and his share of songs. Look at the way he has your bib destroyed that I was after washing in the morning!

CHILD. He was holding me on the horse. We were riding, I might have fallen. He held me.

MOTHER. I give you my word you are done now with riding horses. Let him go on his road. I have no time to be cleaning the place after the like of him.

CHILD. He is tired. Let him stop here till evening.

TRAVELLING MAN. Let me rest here for a while, I have been travelling a long way.

MOTHER. Where did you come from to-day?

TRAVELLING MAN. I came over Slieve Echtge from Slieve na n-Or. I had no house to stop in. I walked the long bog road, the wind was going through me, there was no shelter to be got, the red mud of the road was heavy on my feet. I got no welcome in the villages, and so I came on to this place, to the rising of the river at Ballylee.

MOTHER. It is best for you to go on to the town. It is not far for you to go. We will maybe have company coming in here.

[*She pours out flour into a bowl and begins mixing.*]

TRAVELLING MAN. Will you give me a bit of that dough to bring with me? I have gone a long time fasting.

MOTHER. It is not often in the year I make bread like this. There are a few cold potatoes on the dresser, are they not good enough for you? There is many a one would be glad to get them.

TRAVELLING MAN. Whatever you will give me, I will take it.

MOTHER [*going to the dresser for the potatoes and looking at the shelves*]. What in the earthly world has happened all the delf? Where are the jugs gone and the plates? They were all in it when I went out a while ago.

CHILD [*hanging his head*]. We were making a garden with them. We were making that garden there in the corner.

MOTHER. Is that what you were doing after I bidding you to sit still and to keep yourself quiet?

It is to tie you in the chair I will another time! My grand jugs! [*She picks them up and wipes them.*] My plates that I bought the first time I ever went marketing into Gort. The best in the shop they were. [*One slips from her hand and breaks.*] Look at that now, look what you are after doing.

[*She gives a slap at the* CHILD.]

TRAVELLING MAN. Do not blame the child. It was I myself took them down from the dresser.

MOTHER [*turning on him*]. It was you took them! What business had you doing that? It's the last time a tramp or a tinker or a rogue of the roads will have a chance of laying his hand on anything in this house. It is jailed you should be! What did you want touching the dresser at all? Is it looking you were for what you could bring away?

TRAVELLING MAN [*taking the* CHILD'S *hands*]. I would not refuse these hands that were held out for them. If it was for the four winds of the world he had asked, I would have put their bridles into these innocent hands.

MOTHER [*taking up the jug and throwing the branch on the floor*]. Get out of this! Get out of this I tell you! There is no shelter here for the like of you! Look at that mud on the floor! You are not fit to come into the house of any decent respectable person!

[*The room begins to darken.*]

TRAVELLING MAN. Indeed, I am more used to the roads than to the shelter of houses. It is often I have spent the night on the bare hills.

MOTHER. No wonder in that! [*She begins to*

sweep floor.] Go out of this now to whatever company you are best used to, whatever they are. The worst of people it is likely they are, thieves and drunkards and shameless women.

TRAVELLING MAN. Maybe so. Drunkards and thieves and shameless women, stones that have fallen, that are trodden under foot, bodies that are spoiled with sores, bodies that are worn with fasting, minds that are broken with much sinning, the poor, the mad, the bad. . . .

MOTHER. Get out with you! Go back to your friends, I say!

TRAVELLING MAN. I will go. I will go back to the high road that is walked by the bare feet of the poor, by the innocent bare feet of children. I will go back to the rocks and the wind, to the cries of the trees in the storm! [*He goes out.*]

CHILD. He has forgotten his branch!
[*Takes it and follows him.*]

MOTHER [*still sweeping*]. My good plates from the dresser, and dirty red mud on the floor, and the sticks all scattered in every place. [*Stoops to pick them up.*] Where is the child gone? [*Goes to door.*] I don't see him—he couldn't have gone to the river—it is getting dark—the bank is slippy. Come back! Come back! Where are you? [CHILD *runs in.*]

MOTHER. O where were you? I was in dread it was to the river you were gone, or into the river.

CHILD. I went after him. He is gone over the river.

MOTHER. He couldn't do that. He couldn't go through the flood.

CHILD. He did go over it. He was as if walking on the water. There was a light before his feet.

MOTHER. That could not be so. What put that thought in your mind ?

CHILD. I called to him to come back for the branch, and he turned where he was in the river, and he bade me to bring it back, and to show it to yourself.

MOTHER [*taking the branch*]. There are fruit and flowers on it. It is a branch that is not of any earthly tree. [*Falls on her knees.*] He is gone, he is gone, and I never knew him ! He was that stranger that gave me all ! He is the King of the World !

PARIS AND ŒNONE

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

LAURENCE BINYON

PARIS AND ŒNONE

A TRAGEDY IN ONE ACT

LAURENCE BINYON

SCENE: *Mount Ida. At the right a hut covered with vines, half seen. In the background trees and bushes with an opening near the centre, through which a path descends into the plain of Troy below. Evening falling. Two girls,* PYRGO *and* MELISSA, *appear through the opening, having climbed the path.* PYRGO *enters first.*

PYRGO. Come, we are late.

MELISSA. Oh, I am out of breath.

PYRGO. The woodcutters are waving us good-night.
See what a pile of timber they have made;
And still the tallest oak-tree is to fall.

MELISSA. I love to watch them: let us wait a moment.
Look, they are tugging at the cords, it quivers,
It cracks and rocks. How fearfully it hangs!
It is falling, look! still falling; it is down!
Oh, what a groan! Did Hector fall so grandly
When fierce Achilles smote him? Even so
He must have fallen.

PYRGO. Shame on you, Melissa!
Have you the heart to name that day of woe?
The broken heart of Troy sent up that day
A groan, which even now is in my ears.

I heard it on the mountains, and I wept,
Although I knew not what great cause I had.

MELISSA. I was a child then. But I wonder much
What was the wailing that to-day we heard
Down by the city gates. These many hours
They have been closed, and the plain empty; yet
When we passed by this morning, how we saw
The battle run like breakers in a bay,
Tossing with plumes and lances!

PYRGO. Come away.
The pathway will be dark under the trees.

MELISSA. Pyrgo, is Priam dead, or Agamemnon?
Or is it fair Prince Paris? What hath happened?

PYRGO. Hush, lest Œnone hear you, and her eye
Look askance on you; she has power to change
The bloom upon your cheek, and wither up
The udders of our sheep and waste our flocks.

MELISSA. She has no power to lure her Paris back.

PYRGO. Yet she can charm the almost dead to life.
When Meladon was bitten by the viper
Two summers past, and all his flesh was cold
And pale as mushrooms, she found certain leaves
That sucked the poison sweetly out, and now——

MELISSA. His cheek is brown as any hazel nut.
How strange! Had I such magic at my will,
Soon would I lure Prince Paris to my feet.

PYRGO. You have not seen his lady Helen's eyes!

MELISSA. But she is Greek, and Menelaus' queen.

PYRGO. Hush!

MELISSA. Is it here she dwells ?

PYRGO [*nodding*]. Still beautiful
She is, for I have seen her, and they say
She was once happy. But we loiter long.
Come, come.

MELISSA. I'm following. Oh, a violet !
I should have crushed it with another ſtep.
It is all dewy, and it smells of spring.
The firſt found is the sweeteſt.

PYRGO [*climbing a ſteep path at the right*]. Take my hand.
Look down, there is a litter coming up.

MELISSA. And it has ſtopped among the wood-cutters,
The bearers speak with them. Oh, let us ſtay.

PYRGO. We muſt not, hush ! Œnone's coming forth.

[*The girls, often glancing back, ascend the path at the right.* ŒNONE *comes out, right. During the following speech she brings out logs from the hut, and piles them, one by one, in the centre of the stage.*]

ŒNONE. Laſt night I dreamed of Paris. There he seemed
To rise upon the darkness, Oh, how pale !
Some mortal languor had subdued his limbs :
His head drooped backward, heavy like a flower
When hail has hurt it : his lips moved not, but
His gaze was of a spirit deep in pain.
One arm hung liſtless ; but I thought the other
Was in the motion to ſtretch out toward me,
Then paused, as if unwilling so to plead.

An evil omen !—yet, that arm toward me
Half lifted, and that look !
—If he be wounded, what is that to me ?
In Helen's arms he rests, and Helen's hands
Are soothing his hot temples ; he looks up
In Helen's eyes.—
You little tender shoots upon the vine
You swell with the sweet spring, how can you swell
So confident and blithe ? Can you not feel
Already ere your grapes have coloured round
And ripened, the rude hands of vintagers,
Strong-fingered jesting boys and laughing girls,
Crush your red blood to make the merry wine ?
So my hope grows, and so its blood is crushed
To make the mirth of others ; and yet still
I hope ! Was ever woman fool as I ?
They call Cassandra wretched, because none
Believes her word, yet she at least believes.
[*She kindles a fire.*]
Break into flame, shoot bright, my signal fire !
Once you could call my Paris up from Troy !
He left the dances and the feasts for me.
Clear burns the old wood. O that my heart were old,
Old, sere, and dry, and burning in this flame,
That I might perish clean in the white fire,
Forget, and have no aching at my breast,
No waking out of dreams, quite, quite forget.—
They call me sorceress,
Imagine I have power to sway the moon
And lead astray the stars : and power I have,
As shepherds know, to heal the serpent's bite.
Young Meladon I healed, though he was dying,
And gave him to his weeping love again.

Oh, that day I was happy. Even to-day
I saw on yonder crag the little herb
Which in my hand was life, shooting afresh.
To others I can still bring life and joy:
Only myself I have no power to heal.
[*She lies down by the fire.*]
Ten years, ten years, gone like a single sigh!
For me; but not for him! Oh, he is changed.
He is not now that Paris, whose young brow
Shone like a god's, to look on whom was hope,
To hear, delight.—He goes to Helen now.
The evening brings him. Miserable me!
—Ah yet,
The queen of Menelaus cannot know
The glory of the spring, when we were young,
When—O that hour of hours!—he stole to me
Full of the wondrous news
How he, the shepherd's boy, who all men praised
And all men loved, who kept their flocks from harm,
Who slew the wolf and lion without fear,
How he was Prince of Troy, and Priam's eldest son.
Oh, royal were the thoughts of his heart's youth
Poured out for me that day. Ah me, the first
Of all those thousand kisses that of old
Would naturally flower upon his lips!
I only have the honey of those hours,
Those old hours, those sweet hours. . . .
[*The voice of* PARIS *coming up the hill, faintly heard.*]
Œnone!

ŒNONE. That was my love's voice! No, no.

PARIS [*nearer*]. Œnone!

ŒNONE. Oh, I fear.

PARIS [*appearing*]. Œnone!

ŒNONE. Defend me from ill dreams! He is so pale!
[*Rising to her knees and turning round.*]
Why comest thou again this second time?
Oh, Paris, is it over? Art thou free?
Dear spirit, leavest thou the world to take
Farewell of thy Œnone? Now at last
The sweetness runs about my heart again.
Paris, my golden Paris, glide not yet
To Lethe water; let me bless thee first,
Because my name was still upon thy lips.
Remember me, beloved!

PARIS [*moving a pace nearer*]. Fear me not.
It is no fleshless phantom, but myself,
Paris! I breathe, my heart yet beats. Be glad!
The signal fire is kindled; I am come.

ŒNONE. Touch me not, mocker. Now I hate you. Go.

PARIS. Œnone, I am Paris, whom you loved.
What sudden madness changes you? even now
The words of love sound blessed in my ears.

ŒNONE. I thought you dead, I thought you freed, I thought
Your death-delivered spirit flew to me.
Oh, never else would I have spoken so!
You shame me, you betray me. When I thought
That you were that dead Paris whom I loved,

Alas, that moment I was happy : now
It is a dream ; now you are Helen's. Go !

PARIS. Œnone, I am wounded, I am dying !
Here on my shoulder where your head was used
To rest above the beating of my heart,
And your soft hair flowed over both my arms,
And your sweet breath was mingled with my own,
Here, here hath Philoctetes' poisoned barb
Grazed the firm flesh ; a little wound it is,
But pierces me with agony, and now
From head to heel through all my veins I burn,
I burn with fire all Simois could not cool.
But you, that know the power of every herb,
Heal me, for only you can heal me now,
Œnone !

ŒNONE. Go to Helen, ask of her.

PARIS. Speak not of her. Would I had never crossed
The salt blue seas that smiled before my sail
On that too prosperous voyage ! Would that storms
Had drowned me deep under the senseless surge,
Or ever I had seen Eurotas' banks
And Lacedaemon's hills. Would I had stayed
For ever here on Ida, our dear home !

ŒNONE. The web once woven we cannot unweave.

PARIS. The unkind gods made me their instrument.

ŒNONE. They chose you, Paris, for your fickle heart.

PARIS. I have been fickle, yes, and wandered far,
But the heart comes home at last ; I come to you.

As I came hither, every step shed off
Days, years, and brought me nearer to my youth.
The springs of Ida murmured to my soul,
Sick with this endless toil in blood and spears,
There where I played to you whole summer days
Upon my shepherd's pipe. The woodcutters
Remembered me, and wept to see my pain.
They loved me well of old and love me still,
Though now it is far different from then,
When I was young on Ida, and was famed
For fighting with wild beasts and not with men,
Not with revengeful men, whose murderous swords
I am cursed for bringing on my country now!
The shepherds praised me, that I slew the wolf
And hunted the lion afar; and strangled the bear in his den:
They called me their strong Helper in their songs,
Made feasts for me, and I was crowned with flowers,
And many a maiden pined to have my love,
But I loved you, Œnone, and you loved me.
Oh, had it always been as it then was!

ŒNONE. Ah, ah! alas! as then it was, alas!
But vain is looking back; this is the end.

PARIS. Œnone, heal me; I grow faint, I die.

ŒNONE. So Helen cannot heal you, cannot kiss
The life back, though she kiss a thousand times!
To me, to me your heart cries in its pain:
I only hold the door to your desire.
—What if I open it? Find you that so sweet
Which is to me the driving of a nail
Each day the deeper, here? [*Beating her breast.*]

PARIS. Oh, misery!

ŒNONE [*to herself*]. I cannot bear this longer.

PARIS. Ah, see now
How low is Paris fallen at your feet;
He is dying at your feet. Since love is gone,
And pity gone, while yet your Paris breathes,
Recall the time when he was what he was,
Not what he is; Œnone, once, but once,
Those happy hours remember!

ŒNONE. Have I not
Remembered them? Those soft uncounted hours,
Spun for our pleasure out of smoothest wool,
I never knew their sweetness till 'twas gone,
And Life unmasking showed her Fury face,
And knotted the remembrance for my scourge.

PARIS. Oh, wretch, wretch, perjured, base wretch that I am!
I left a ruby richer than the world
In this true heart. I have no will to live,
I have deserved to die this bitter death.
Look on me gently, Œnone, turn your face
Once more, for the last time, on dying Paris,
Who loves you, loves you.
[*He faints.*]

ŒNONE [*lifting his head to rest on her lap*]. No, no, Paris, live!
I have been cruel; dear, unclose your eyes.
Look up, look into mine. I weep for you.
You shall not die.

PARIS [*opening his eyes*]. I love you.

ŒNONE. It is sweet.

PARIS. Œnone, let me die but in your arms!

ŒNONE. You shall not die, for I will heal you.

PARIS. Weep not, Œnone!

ŒNONE. Let them drop,
The tears that comfort me.
Your head upon my breast
As it was in the old days!

PARIS. Kiss me!

ŒNONE. Your lips are cold.

PARIS [*raising himself with a gesture of despairing energy*]. Œnone, bring me life!

ŒNONE [*shrinking, as if frightened*]. I go, I bring you life.
[*She rises to go.*]

PARIS. I shall live, I shall live, I shall live!

ŒNONE [*turning round as she goes, and seeing his face*].
Ah, ah! what strange smile now is on your face!
It is not love, Oh, now, it is not love.
'Tis confident and cold.

PARIS [*imperiously*]. Œnone, life!

ŒNONE. Blind, credulous and foolish that I am,
I see too clear, it is not me he wants,
'Tis only life.

PARIS. Œnone!

ŒNONE. Smile again,
For when you smile I hate you. I must hate,

Or lose my very reason. Oh, my heart,
'Tis more than I can bear. He does not love me!
He never loved. He never understood
What to love is, he only thought to cozen
With tender words my tender and weak heart,
And lure this wretched gift of life from me,
And when 'twas won to triumph and to smile
Into the arms of Helen.

PARIS. Madness, hear me!

ŒNONE. No, no, no, never more!

PARIS. Œnone, stay!
[ŒNONE *rushes out at the right.* PARIS *tries to follow her, but sinks down.*]
Empty now is the world.
Thou must die, Paris.
Now, had I strength, here would I strike myself.
As she condemned me, I condemn myself.
I am a king's son; I have been greatly loved.
This is the end of all, to die alone
And to deserve no other death. Come quickly,
Darkness! Let me forget what thing I am.
Helen!—but no, I must not think of her.
Farewell for ever! All is forfeited——
[*He calls to his attendants below.*]
Corythus, Corythus! Emathion!
It comes, it comes, incredible dark death.
Would it had been with shouting and with spears,
That I might rush and wrestle with my doom.
Not stealing in this waft of violets,
To slay me with the sweetness I have lost.
[*After a pause, the two appear from below in haste.*]
Come to me. Bear me away. There is no hope.

CORYTHUS. Oh, my dear prince!

PARIS. Bear me away, but no,
Not down to Troy, for all men hate me there.
When I am dead, still let my body be
Where I am loved, on Ida's pleasant side;
Nor let the Trojan rabble rail on me,
And grin upon my fall. There's many a man
Would stone my very body on the pyre
Or have it thrown to dogs. It shall not be.
Bid these good shepherds and these woodcutters
Make me a pyre out of the trees I knew—
I played my pipe beneath them as a boy,
But gladlier would I hear them toss in flame
Than rustle leaves in springtime any more.

CORYTHUS. It shall be done.

EMATHION. Woe for us all!

CORYTHUS. The gods
Foreknew this thing; they have prepared a pyre.
The woodcutters have felled the trees this day,
It stands below. Little I thought to see
Upon that wood the body of my prince.

PARIS. Lay me on that, and set a torch to it
This very night.

CORYTHUS. So soon?

EMATHION. Thou must not die.

PARIS. Let them not come
From Troy to fetch me, let my body burn
Even when the breath is from me. The great flame

Shall summon all the gazing eyes of Troy
And feast their hearts that hate me. But O thou,
My father Priam, thine old heart prepare
For this last grief that shall bow down thy head—
The last of many griefs: yet thou wilt weep,
I know, even for me who brought them all.
[*A paroxysm seizes him.*]
My strength goes from me. Hold me, both of you—
Nay, I will stand alone. Helen, oh, Helen!
[PARIS *reels, is caught by the* ATTENDANTS, *who bear him slowly, with murmured lamentations, down the path. After a pause the voice of* ŒNONE *is heard timidly raised as she returns.*]

ŒNONE. Paris! . . . Answer, speak . . . [*When there is no answer*] Paris, the herb
Is in my hand, the leaves that bring you life.
[*Appearing and looking round for* PARIS, *then stopping in despair.*]
Alone and dying in this darkness, oh,
Where have I driven him? Where lies he now,
Fainting, perhaps, and fallen on the rocks?
Help me, help me! Will no one help me!
I cannot see clear what I have done.
I was the wronged one, but now
It is I who am cruel, and he—
I see him beautiful and suffering there—
Torture, torture!
I love him not, no, no, I love him not:
And yet, and yet, I will not have him die.
Wretched and desolate I seemed,
But surely then I was happy,
As now I am wretched indeed.

How cold it grows, cold as the grave. Paris,
Where are you ? Come, come back !

[*The last words are spoken as she goes out searching among the thicket at the left.* HELEN, *in a dark robe, appears between two trees.*]

HELEN. I saw from far flames trembling in these trees
Like many shaken swords ; and on the air
A cry lamenting down the darkness came.
—I find a silence, ashes, solitude !
Yet in my mind that flame, that cry, gone on
Before me like dishevelled mourners pass,
Proclaiming through the streets of all the world
" Paris is fled from Helen ! " Whither now ?
What matters it ? The lost may meet the lost.
My feet are bruised, I care not ; on, to seek him,
Starve with him on these stony hills, or be
Slain by him in his madness : rather that
Than linger in the loathing eye of Troy.

ŒNONE [*heard without, crying*]. Paris !

HELEN. Who in this desert calls on Paris ?

ŒNONE [*hurriedly appearing*]. I !
If you have found him, bring me straight to him.

HELEN. Know you not then the face of Helen ?

ŒNONE. Ah !

HELEN. Why stand you now so frozen at my face
Who were this instant like a burning flame ?

ŒNONE. I am Œnone.

HELEN. Live the dead ? Alas !
The world is filled full of my enemies.

ŒNONE. Away, away! for when I look on you
A snake bites in my heart to poison it,
And turn me from the thing I mean to do.
Paris, I will . . . I know not what I say . . .
Fill my thoughts, Paris!

HELEN. Paris is not here.

ŒNONE. I left him here; some swoon has taken him,
Crawling, so faint he was, among the rocks,
Alas, alas! But I must find him; see,
Here are the herbs that I will heal him with.

HELEN. O miserable boast of foolish herbs,
When Paris is forsaken of the gods,
Helen of Paris; Troy to-night's a grave,
And all that was of honour upon earth
Trodden to mud and ashes.
[*Cries heard below.*]

ŒNONE. He is there!
What moments have I wasted! Now at last
I have found him; now he shall be healed, shall live.

HELEN. And when you have healed him!

ŒNONE. When I have healed him? . . . Oh! . . .
[*With a sudden change and impetuous gesture.*]
Take you the herbs!

HELEN. I have no faith in them.

ŒNONE. Take you the herbs! Look, there are many leaves,
And you must lay them close upon the wound.
They will draw out the poison, he will sleep.
Haste, he is dying, haste.

HELEN. From you? I cannot.

ŒNONE. Is it so little to have given you this,
Who have taken everything I had from me,
Given her whom I have hated every hour
These ten years, such a gift? Is it not enough?
Go, go!

HELEN. I fear you, you would humble me.

ŒNONE. He is dying; go!

HELEN. Give me them.
[*Turning, she is about to go, when a faint glare, brightening every moment, appears beyond.*]
What is that?
Is Troy aflame?

ŒNONE. It is not Troy.

HELEN. The flames
Shoot up into the dark; the trees stand round;
And there are faces in the glare, a throng
All round it, motionless; why move they not?
See others come, women and men, and kneel,
And bow their heads.

ŒNONE. It is a pyre that burns.

HELEN. And on the pyre—it is not he!

ŒNONE. 'Tis he.

HELEN [*dropping the herbs*]. Now in my enemies' land I am alone.

ŒNONE. Oh, that those flames were streaming over me!

HELEN. They blind me, roaring between me and him.
They have devoured my Paris, he is dead,
Paris, for whom I crossed the bitter sea.
Ah, ah,
But those that hate me live, and only they.

ŒNONE. Now, Helen, shall our hearts be proved by fire,
Your love and my love. Will you not go down,
Down to that pyre, and take the kiss you crave,
And fold him in your arms to be your own
In dying as in living? Will you not?
[HELEN *shudders and is silent.*]
Then leap, you flames, I bring you fuel fit,
A heart that hungers to be fire. So, so,
Die down, and cower, and tremble, and recoil
A moment, to soar up more ardently
And wrap me closer, closer to my love,
My love with me at last. Paris, I come!

[ŒNONE *disappears down the hill.* HELEN *gazes after her in horror; then, when a loud cry of many voices is heard below, and the flames leap up, she covers her face with her robe, as the curtain falls.*]

THE DEATH-TRAP

"SAKI" (H. H. MUNRO)

THE DEATH-TRAP[1]

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CHARACTERS

DIMITRI (*Reigning Prince of Kedaria*).
DR. STRONETZ, COL. GIRNITZA, MAJOR VONTIEFF, CAPTAIN SHULTZ — *Officers of the Kranitzki Regiment of Guards.*

SCENE: *An Ante-chamber in the Prince's Castle at Tzern.*

TIME: *The Present Day. The scene opens about ten o'clock in the evening.*

An ante-chamber, rather sparsely furnished. Some rugs of Balkan manufacture on the walls. A narrow table in centre of room, another table set with wine bottles and goblets near window, R. *Some high-backed chairs set here and there round room. Tiled stove,* L. *Door in centre.*

GIRNITZA, VONTIEFF *and* SHULTZ *are talking together as curtain rises.*

GIRNITZA. The Prince suspects something: I can see it in his manner.

SHULTZ. Let him suspect. He'll know for certain in half an hour's time.

[1] For permission to perform this play, application must be made to the Authors' Society, 11 Gower Street, London, W.C.1.

GIRNITZA. The moment the Andrieff Regiment has marched out of the town we are ready for him.

SHULTZ [*drawing revolver from case and aiming it at an imaginary person*]. And then—short shrift for your Royal Highness! I don't think many of my bullets will go astray.

GIRNITZA. The revolver was never a favourite weapon of mine. I shall finish the job with this [*half draws his sword and sends it back into its scabbard with a click*].

VONTIEFF. Oh, we shall do for him right enough. It's a pity he's such a boy, though. I would rather we had a grown man to deal with.

GIRNITZA. We must take our chance when we can find it. Grown men marry and breed heirs and then one has to massacre a whole family. When we've killed this boy we've killed the last of the dynasty, and laid the way clear for Prince Karl. As long as there was one of this brood left our good Karl could never win the throne.

VONTIEFF. Oh, I know this is our great chance. Still I wish the boy could be cleared out of our path by the finger of Heaven rather than by our hands.

SHULTZ. Hush! Here he comes.

[*Enter, by door, centre,* PRINCE DIMITRI, *in undress cavalry uniform. He comes straight into room, begins taking cigarette out of a case, and looks coldly at the three officers.*]

DIMITRI. You needn't wait.

[*They bow and withdraw,* SHULTZ *going last and staring insolently at the* PRINCE. *He seats himself at*

table, centre. As door shuts he stares for a moment at it, then suddenly bows his head on his arms in attitude of despair. . . . A knock is heard at the door. DIMITRI *leaps to his feet. Enter* STRONETZ *in civilian attire.*]

DIMITRI [*eagerly*]. Stronetz! My God, how glad I am to see you!

STRONETZ. One wouldn't have thought so, judging by the difficulty I had in gaining admission. I had to invent a special order to see you on a matter of health. And they made me give up my revolver; they said it was some new regulation.

DIMITRI [*with a short laugh*]. They have taken away every weapon I possess, under some pretext or another. My sword has gone to be reset, my revolver is being cleaned, my hunting-knife has been mislaid.

STRONETZ [*horrified*]. My God, Dimitri! You don't mean——?

DIMITRI. Yes, I do. I am trapped. Since I came to the throne three years ago as a boy of fourteen I have been watched and guarded against this moment, but it has caught me unawares.

STRONETZ. But your guards!

DIMITRI. Did you notice the uniforms? The Kranitzki Regiment. They are heart and soul for Prince Karl; the artillery are equally disaffected. The Andrieff Regiment was the only doubtful factor in their plans, and it marches out to camp to-night. The Lonyadi Regiment comes in to relieve it an hour or so later.

STRONETZ. They are loyal, surely?

DIMITRI. Yes, but their loyalty will arrive an hour or so too late.

STRONETZ. Dimitri! You mustn't stay here to be killed! You must get out quick!

DIMITRI. My dear good Stronetz, for more than a generation the Karl faction have been trying to stamp our line out of existence. I am the last of the lot; do you suppose that they are going to let me slip out of their claws now? They're not so damned silly.

STRONETZ. But this is awful! You sit there and talk as if it were a move in a chess game.

DIMITRI [*rising*]. Oh, Stronetz! If you knew how I hate death! I'm not a coward, but I do so want to live. Life is so horribly fascinating when one is young, and I've tasted so little of it yet. [*Goes to window.*] Look out of the window at that fairyland of mountains with the forest running up and down all over it. You can just see Grodvitz where I shot all last autumn, up there on the left, and far away beyond it all is Vienna. Were you ever in Vienna, Stronetz? I've only been there once, and it seemed like a magic city to me. And there are other wonderful cities in the world that I've never seen. Oh, I do so want to live. Think of it, here I am alive and talking to you, as we've talked dozens of times in this grey old room, and to-morrow a fat stupid servant will be washing up a red stain in that corner—I think it will probably be in that corner. [*He points to corner near stove*, L.]

STRONETZ. But you mustn't be butchered in cold blood like this, Dimitri. If they've left you nothing to fight with I can give you a drug from my case that will bring you a speedy death before they can touch you.

DIMITRI. Thanks, no, old chap. You had better leave before it begins; they won't touch you. But I won't drug myself. I've never seen anyone killed before, and I shan't get another opportunity.

STRONETZ. Then I won't leave you; you can see two men killed while you are about it.

[*A band is heard in distance playing a march.*]

DIMITRI. The Andrieff Regiment marching out! Now they won't waste much time! [*He draws himself up tense in corner by stove.*] Hush, they are coming!

STRONETZ [*rushing suddenly towards* DIMITRI]. Quick! An idea! Tear open your tunic! [*He unfastens* DIMITRI'S *tunic and appears to be testing his heart. The door swings open and the three officers enter.* STRONETZ *waves a hand commanding silence, and continues his testing. The officers stare at him.*]

GIRNITZA. Dr. Stronetz, will you have the goodness to leave the room? We have some business with His Royal Highness. Urgent business, Dr. Stronetz.

STRONETZ [*facing round*]. Gentlemen, I fear my business is more grave. I have the saddest of duties to perform. I know you would all gladly lay down your lives for your Prince, but there are some perils which even your courage cannot avert.

GIRNITZA [*puzzled*]. What are you talking of, sir?

STRONETZ. The Prince sent for me to prescribe for some disquieting symptoms that have declared themselves. I have made my examination. My duty is a cruel one. . . . I cannot give him six days to live!

[DIMITRI *sinks into chair near table in pretended collapse. The officers turn to each other, nonplussed.*]

GIRNITZA. You are certain? It is a grave thing you are saying. You are not making any mistake?

STRONETZ [*laying his hand on* DIMITRI'S *shoulder*]. Would to God I were!

[*The officers again turn, whispering to each other.*]

GIRNITZA. It seems our business can wait.

VONTIEFF [*to* DIMITRI]. Sire, this is the finger of Heaven.

DIMITRI [*brokenly*]. Leave me.

[*They salute and slowly withdraw.* DIMITRI *slowly raises his head, then springs to his feet, rushes to door and listens, then turns round jubilantly to* STRONETZ.]

DIMITRI. Spoofed them! Ye gods, that was an idea, Stronetz!

STRONETZ [*who stands quietly looking at* DIMITRI]. It was not altogether an inspiration, Dimitri. A look in your eyes suggested it. I had seen men who were stricken with a mortal disease look like that.

DIMITRI. Never mind what suggested it, you have

saved me. The Lonyadi Regiment will be here at any moment and Girnitza's gang daren't risk anything then. You've fooled them, Stronetz, you've fooled them.

STRONETZ [*sadly*]. Boy, I haven't fooled them. . . . [DIMITRI *stares at him for a long moment.*] It was a real examination I made while those brutes were waiting there to kill you. It was a real report I made; the malady *is* there.

DIMITRI [*slowly*]. Was it *all* true, what you told them?

STRONETZ. It was all true. You have not six days to live.

DIMITRI [*bitterly*]. Death has come twice for me in one evening. I'm afraid he must be in earnest. [*Passionately*] Why didn't you let them kill me? That would have been better than this "to-be-left-till-called-for" business. [*Paces across to window*, R., *and looks out. Turns suddenly.*] Stronetz! You offered me a way of escape from a cruel death just now. Let me escape now from a crueller one. I am a monarch. I won't be kept waiting by death. Give me that little bottle.

[STRONETZ *hesitates, then draws out a small case, extracts bottle and gives it to him.*]

STRONETZ. Four or five drops will do what you ask for.

DIMITRI. Thank you. And now, old friend, good-bye. Go quickly. You've seen me just a little brave—I may not keep it up. I want you to

remember me as being brave. Good-bye, best of friends, go.

[STRONETZ *wrings his hand and rushes from the room with his face hidden in his arm. The door shuts.* DIMITRI *looks for a moment after his friend. Then he goes quickly over to side table and uncorks wine bottle. He is about to pour some wine into a goblet when he pauses as if struck by a new idea. He goes to door, throws it open and listens, then calls,* "GIRNITZA, VONTIEFF, SHULTZ!" *Darting back to the table he pours the entire phial of poison into the wine bottle, and thrusts phial into his pocket. Enter the three officers.*]

DIMITRI [*pouring the wine into four goblets*]. The Prince is dead—long live the Prince! [*He seats himself.*] The old feud must be healed now, there is no one left of my family to keep it on, Prince Karl must succeed. Long life to Prince Karl! Gentlemen of the Kranitzki Guards, drink to your future sovereign.

[*The three officers drink after glancing at each other.*]

GIRNITZA. Sire, we shall never serve a more gallant Prince than your Royal Highness.

DIMITRI. That is true, because you will never serve another Prince. Observe, I drink fair! [*Drains goblet.*]

GIRNITZA. What do you mean, never serve another Prince?

DIMITRI [*rises*]. I mean that I am going to march into the next world at the head of my Kranitzki Guards. You came in here to-night to kill me.

[*They all ſtart.*] You found that Death had foreſtalled you. I thought it a pity that the evening should be waſted, so I've killed *you*, that's all!

SHULTZ. The wine! He's poisoned us!

[VONTIEFF *ſeizes the bottle, and examines it.* SHULTZ *ſmells his empty goblet.*]

GIRNITZA. Ah! Poiſoned! [*He draws his ſword and makes a ſtep towards* DIMITRI, *who is ſitting on the edge of the centre table.*]

DIMITRI. Oh, certainly, if you wiſh it. I'm due to die of diſeaſe in a few days and of poiſon in a minute or two, but if you like to take a little extra trouble about my end, please yourſelf. [GIRNITZA *reels and drops ſword on table and falls back into chair groaning.* SHULTZ *falls across table and* VONTIEFF *ſtaggers againſt wall. At that moment a lively march is heard approaching.* DIMITRI *ſeizes the ſword and waves it.*]

DIMITRI. Aha! the Lonyadi Regiment marching in! My good loyal Kranitzki Guards ſhall keep me company into the next world. God ſave the Prince! [*Laughs wildly.*] Colonel Girnitza, I never thought death . . . could be . . . ſo amuſing.

[*He falls dying to the ground.*]

From "The Square Egg."

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT[1]

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

CHARACTERS

LORD REDCHESTER
LADY REDCHESTER
THE HON. GUY SYDNEY
THE HON. LETTICE SYDNEY
THE HON. AND RIGHT REV. CHARLES SYDNEY, *Bishop of Redchester*
PRESTON
THE "WOLF"

TIME: *Three o'clock on Christmas morning.*

SCENE: *The Library of Tudor Manor, Redchester. Down right is a window with curtains drawn over it. Up on right is a fireplace. To the right of centre is a large safe let into the wall. At centre is a door, while on left stands a table with whisky and soda, glasses and boxes of cigars and cigarettes. There are half a dozen chairs disposed about the room and one or two old family portraits upon the walls. The stage is in darkness when the curtain rises.*

After curtain is up a light flashes between the curtains that cover the window. Then one curtain is drawn stealthily back and the "WOLF" *enters. He is clad in tight-fitting black knickerbockers and has a black cap on his head and black mask over his eyes. He carries an electric torch in one hand and a bag in the other. He lets the torch travel*

[1] All acting rights in this play are the property of Sir Barry V. Jackson.

over the room, finds the safe and deposits the bag beside it. He goes to door, and listens. Leaves door ajar and finds an electric switch by mantelpiece. He turns on an electric light over mantelpiece and looks at his watch. Then he examines safe and opens his bag. He lays out a dozen burglar's tools and a lamp on the carpet. Lamp is connected with wire of a strong electric light. He also brings an automatic revolver from the bag and puts it on a chair close to him. He is fumbling at the safe when the HON. GUY SYDNEY *enters the room.* GUY *wears pyjamas and slippers. He comes right in, but the burglar does not immediately notice him.*

GUY. What ho!

WOLF [*leaping for automatic and pointing it at* GUY]. Hands up!

GUY [*putting up his hands*]. You're a burglar!

WOLF. What d'you think I was? A piano-tuner? Hands up, I say!

GUY. All right—all right! The real thing, by Jove!

WOLF. I'm the "Wolf"—so watch out. Sit there and if you make a sound, I'll plug you.

GUY [*sitting in easy chair*]. My dear chap, we were only saying at dinner that nothing ever happens here. Now something has. D'you really mean you're that world-famous burglar, the "Wolf"?

WOLF. Yes—I'm him.

GUY. Some Christmas for us—eh? People always say we're the oldest and dullest family in the country. Nothing ever happens to the Sydneys. We never

run away with other men's wives, or their money, or anything. We never shine and we never go out—just glimmer century after century. We never get into newspapers, we never even have accidents out hunting. And no burglars, no fires; nothing but weddings and funerals. But now all's changed!

WOLF. Why are you here? I'll swear you never heard me.

GUY. Not a sound. Merely a coincidence. Did myself rather well at dinner last night, got thirsty and wanted some soda-water [*looks at table*].

WOLF. Hands up!

GUY. My dear chap, don't get nasty; don't regard me as an enemy. You're manna in the wilderness—you are indeed. If you only knew how this will brighten our Christmas and wake us all up! You've come to "crack a crib"? That's the technical term, isn't it?

WOLF. D'you know the password of this safe?

GUY. On my honour I don't, or you should be saved all the trouble possible. Only the Governor knows it. He's got the family Christmas presents in that safe. You've come for them, no doubt?

WOLF. I have.

GUY. Well, go to it. He won't miss them. He can't help being enormously rich, you know. His fortune's like your revolver—automatic. Don't be huffy and silly. Let me put my hands down and give you a drink?

WOLF. Any treachery and I'll plug you!

GUY [*getting up*]. My dear Wolf, a Sydney couldn't be treacherous. We're the most trustworthy family in England. Always ran dead straight—always been faithful to King and Country since we fought against William the Conqueror and got downed. Rectitude is our strong suit; that's why we're so dull. This is pre-war whisky; you'll like it. [*Mixes whisky and soda-water.*]

WOLF. Not too strong.

GUY [*bringing him the drink*]. And you really think you can break into that thing?

WOLF. The safe isn't built to beat me.

GUY. Stout fellow! It's an American contraption. By the way, are you an American crook? They rather specialise in swagger cracksmen over there.

WOLF. It's worth while in the States. When they catch you, if you're bad enough, you go to Sing Sing, and they give you flower gardens and bridge parties and theatricals and concerts and missionaries. They know how to take care of a great crook in America. But I'm English.

GUY. Glad of that. We've got to take a back seat at such a lot of things nowadays. [*Drinks soda-water.*]

WOLF. Don't talk so loud and shut that door.

GUY [*lighting a cigarette*]. One minute before you begin. Would you mind if I called my sister? This would be such a joy to her—brighten up her Christmas, you know. Living just outside a cathedral

town is slow work for Lettice. You've no idea how she longs for a novelty now and again.

WOLF. If you try to pull my leg—— [*Picking up revolver.*]

GUY. Far from it. The Sydneys never pull people's legs. I'm quite serious. She's a topping girl—quite one of your sort—a Communist and an Anarchist and a Bolshie at heart, though, of course, she's got to hide it. Loves reading about you. You'd be giving a lot of innocent pleasure if you let her see you at work. She's beautiful too, and only twenty-one. You'd like her.

WOLF. I never can say " no " to beauty.

GUY. More can I. It's so commanding.

WOLF. Your word of honour, as a Sydney, that you'll call nobody else ?

GUY. My word of honour. A Sydney can't lie. It's another of our fatal weaknesses and has kept us out of the law and politics and diplomacy—in fact everything but the Church.

WOLF. Very well. Lettice may come.

GUY. Ta ! Don't begin till we're back. The night is still young.

[*Exit* GUY. WOLF *arranges his tools, lights a peculiar lamp, turns on electric light—wire not seen—and gets another drink.*

He is pouring it out when PRESTON, *the butler, enters in a dressing-gown.* PRESTON *carries a poker.*]

PRESTON. There! I thought I 'eard something. You dog!

[*Advances with poker. The* WOLF *plunges at him and disarms him. He takes cord off* PRESTON'S *dressing-gown and ties him into a chair.*]

WOLF. A word and I'll plug you!

PRESTON. Plug and be damned! [*Shouts.*] Thieves—murd——!

[*The* WOLF *puts his hand over* PRESTON'S *mouth, drags a large handkerchief from his pocket and gags* PRESTON.]

WOLF. You old, faithful family servants are the devil! I didn't know there were any left.

[*Enter* GUY *and the* HON. LETTICE SYDNEY. *She is clad in a fantastic kimono.*]

GUY [*introducing her*]. My sister, Lettice—the famous Wolf, Kid. He's come for the Governor's Christmas presents.

LETTICE. Oh! How brave of him! How thrilling! How d'you do? [*Shakes hands.*] Do you think you can manage it? [*Looks at safe.*]

GUY. Why, here's dear old Preston! What on earth did you want to butt in for, old boy? May I set him free, Wolf? He'll be quiet now. He's only our butler.

LETTICE. I'm sure he thought he was doing his duty. He's old-fashioned and prejudiced about the division of property.

WOLF. Your sort divide property one way. I'm out to divide it another.

LETTICE. Exactly—quite right, Wolf. What wonderful tools! Is this a jemmy?

[WOLF *explains them.*]

GUY [*liberating* PRESTON]. Better have a drink and go to bed, old son. This is the famous "Wolf"; all the police in England are after him. And he's chosen us! Isn't it sporting?

PRESTON. He's come to rob the safe!

GUY. I know—the courage of the beggar! I wish I had a nerve like that.

PRESTON. His Lordship——

LETTICE. Don't worry papa. He'll hear all about it to-morrow. It'll be the Christmas of his life!

WOLF. If you don't let me get on with it I'll plug the lot of you.

LETTICE. That's quite all right, Wolf. Get on with it by all means. Be quiet, Preston; if you won't go to bed, sit down and watch. This is the crowning point of our existence, if you could only see it. Nothing so wonderful ever happened before at the Manor.

PRESTON. It's a nightmare! I'll wake up soon, I 'ope.

WOLF. You'll wake up in hell, if you don't shut your mouth. [*Picking up revolver.*]

GUY. You mustn't plug Preston. He'd die for us.

WOLF. Any more talk and he will. [*To* LETTICE] You haven't got the password?

LETTICE. I wish I had. Only papa knows it.

GUY. Shall I ask him?

LETTICE. No, no. I want to see the Wolf use these wonderful tools.

WOLF. I shall cut a hole in the cold steel.

PRESTON. You can't—it's crook-proof, you un'oly rip!

LETTICE. Order, Preston.

WOLF. More light—I want more light.

GUY. Right-o! [*Switches on a blaze of electric light. The* WOLF *gets to work.*]

LETTICE. It's well worth while, Wolf. Papa's presents are priceless. He always lets himself go at Christmas.

PRESTON. This'll kill his lordship.

LETTICE. Don't be sentimental, Preston. Papa

PRESTON. Thank Gord! Here he is!

[*Enter* LORD REDCHESTER. *He wears a scarlet dressing-gown and red silk nightcap. He is a jolly and jovial old man.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Good powers, Guy! And you, Lettice! What have we here! Who the deuce is this?

GUY. It's the Wolf, Governor, the world-famous burglar all England is talking about!

LORD REDCHESTER. The Wolf come to our little place! Surely not. Some impostor pretending to be the Wolf.

WOLF. I'm the Wolf all right.

LORD REDCHESTER. By Jove, you look as though you might be. A tough, dauntless devil I'll wager. Glad to know you. I'm Lord Redchester. [*Shakes hands.*]

LETTICE. And he's come to steal all your Christmas presents, papa—isn't it astounding of him?

LORD REDCHESTER. How did he hear of 'em.

WOLF. I have a thousand secret channels of information.

LORD REDCHESTER. Not Preston? Never old Preston?

PRESTON. Oh, my Gord!

LORD REDCHESTER. A joke, my dear fellow. I'm sure it wasn't you. The Wolf, eh? And come to steal my Christmas gifts. Amazing!

WOLF [*with revolver*]. The password and quick about it, or I'll plug you! I can't mess about here all night.

LETTICE [*taking revolver from him, laughing*]. No, no, Wolf, that's not playing the game. If you're the real Wolf, I'm sure you'll soon break open the safe with your beautiful tools. You must think of us a little. Be sporting about it.

WOLF. Well—if you put it that way——

LORD REDCHESTER. Does he claim that he can open this safe without the password?

LETTICE [*putting the revolver on the mantelpiece*]. I'm

sure he can, papa. There's no safe in the world he can't open.

LORD REDCHESTER. Marvellous! Something to talk about at last! The cigars, Preston.

[PRESTON *fetches box of cigars from table.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Take your time. This is the most interesting thing that has happened in my family since our third kennel-man ran away with my great aunt, Alicia. And that's two hundred years ago!

WOLF [*taking a cigar*]. A corona?

LORD REDCHESTER [*helping himself*]. A double corona, my dear fellow.

WOLF. If there's a catch in this, I'll plug the lot——

GUY. My dear Wolf, there's never a catch in anything the Sydneys do.

WOLF [*looking at cigar*]. Not doped?

LORD REDCHESTER. My tobacco doped! D'you hear that, Preston? [*To* WOLF] It may amuse you to know that cigar cost half a guinea.

WOLF. A light, Preston.

[PRESTON *gives him a light.*]

LETTICE. Do you think I might wake mama? She'll never forgive us if she misses this. You know how she is always yearning for something to happen. It will be cruel, papa, to enjoy the Wolf without her.

LORD REDCHESTER. Thoughtful girl! Call your

mother at once. And tell her to put on her thickest dressing-gown and a shawl.

[*Exit* LETTICE.]

LORD REDCHESTER [*to the* WOLF]. I suppose you seldom have an appreciative audience on these occasions? If you could only do your astounding feats publicly, you'd make a fortune.

WOLF. I've made a fortune all right.

LORD REDCHESTER. No doubt, no doubt. Just going on for the sake of the sport. If I excelled at anything, which I don't, I should hate to give it up.

WOLF. What's this little lot worth? [*Points to safe.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Say eight thousand.

WOLF. Good.

GUY [*examining tools*]. All the best steel—eh?

WOLF. Only use the best.

LORD REDCHESTER. Quite right. I always say "the best is good enough for me."

GUY. Where shall you cut the hole?

WOLF. I cut the hole with my oxyhydrogen blow-pipe—here. [*Chalks a round on safe.*]

GUY. Nothing we can do to help you?

WOLF. No. I work single-handed. If you'll just sit down out of the way! And no larks, mind.

GUY. Chairs, Preston.

[PRESTON *fetches chairs and arranges them in a semicircle.*]

PRESTON. I 'ope you'll excuse me, my lord. If this is a entertainment, I'll go and put on my clothes.

LORD REDCHESTER. Do, Preston. I don't like you in neglige—seems unnatural. But not a word to a soul, mind. Don't wake anybody.

PRESTON [*aside*]. Oh, my Gord!—and Christmas morning and all!

[*Exit* PRESTON. *The* WOLF *begins to work.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Preston has no feeling for romance—his only fault.

WOLF [*mopping his forehead*]. A spot of whisky.

[GUY *gives it to him.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. That's right. Catch the spirit of the season. I never thought I should enjoy a Christmas as much as this. If anybody had said there was a novelty in store for the Sydneys I shouldn't have believed them.

GUY. The Governor has an almost morbid craving for a bit of fun, you know.

WOLF. Has he? Well, some people are easily amused.

[*Enter* LETTICE *and* LADY REDCHESTER. *Her Ladyship wears a showy cap and dressing-gown. She might have a boa round her neck and possibly a pair of woollen gloves. She carries a lorgnette.*]

LADY REDCHESTER. My dear Redchester, is it true?

LORD REDCHESTER. Look at him!

LADY REDCHESTER [*examining* WOLF]. The terror of England! And under our roof! How nice of him! How do you do?

GUY. He's showing us how he does.

WOLF. And I'd do a darned sight better if there wasn't so much talk. Sit down and stow it.

LORD REDCHESTER. Hush, everybody!

LETTICE. Let's sing to him gently—a Christmas carol. "Good King Wenceslas," papa.

[*They sing.*]

WOLF. Shut down on that! Silence, please.

LORD REDCHESTER [*aside to* LADY REDCHESTER]. Called for my Christmas presents.

LADY REDCHESTER. A new sort of Santa Claus.

LORD REDCHESTER [*laughing loudly*]. Good, Sophy, good! Did you hear that, Wolf? You're a new sort of Santa Claus?

[*They laugh.*]

WOLF. As long as you're all pleased. Where's my automatic?

LETTICE. Here it is. I put it on the mantelpiece. [*Gives it to him.*]

GUY. Never like it far from your hand, I expect?

WOLF. Now this light will go through cold steel as though it were butter.

LADY REDCHESTER. Take care, then, and don't burn yourself.

LETTICE. I'll give you first aid if you do.

LADY REDCHESTER. One minute—how Charles would love this! He's so interested in the criminal classes.

WOLF. There ain't no criminal classes, any more than virtuous classes. The rogues and the rulers may both come from the gutter, or the Palace. A man can be in the House of Commons to-day and the House of Detention to-morrow, can't he?

LADY REDCHESTER. You're a great thinker, I see. But do let Charles come.

WOLF. Who's Charles? This ain't a music-hall turn, you know.

LORD REDCHESTER. You needn't mind Charles. Only my brother—quite harmless. The Bishop of Redchester as a matter of fact.

WOLF. I don't like the clergy.

LADY REDCHESTER. More does he—finds them most difficult and lawless.

LETTICE. You'll love Uncle Charles—everybody does. Call him, Guy. He may not approve, but he won't criticise. He never criticises anybody; and never does anything, but just sits on the fence and prays for everybody.

GUY. He'll hate losing his Christmas present.

LORD REDCHESTER. By Jove, he will! But it doesn't matter a button. I'll get him another. His life's so monotonous. It will be something for him to talk to the Dean and Chapter about.

GUY. Right-o!

[*Exit* GUY.]

WOLF [*who has been working blow-pipe*]. You see the solid steel is yielding under the terrific heat of the oxyhydrogen.

LORD REDCHESTER. Famous! So it is! I must get one—might be useful. Where d'you buy 'em?

WOLF. A professional secret; but I dare say I could send you one anonymously.

LORD REDCHESTER. Do, my dear fellow.

LETTICE [*to* LADY REDCHESTER]. An enemy of society, mama, a bitter, sleepless enemy of society.

LADY REDCHESTER. Quite right—if he really knows what society is.

WOLF. Ah! I'm up against something new here! [*They all bend forward.*]

LORD REDCHESTER [*springing up*]. Eh! Another novelty? Some American invention I expect. Don't let it beat you!

WOLF. Sit down—and stop dancing about. There's too much fuss here. [*He is worried and examines safe.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Sorry. [*Returns to seat.*] Anxious work—eh? Want your wits about you. I never had any myself, but I respect you brainy fellows tremendously.

[*Enter* GUY *and the* BISHOP OF REDCHESTER. *The latter wears a purple dressing-gown and a black biretta on his head. He looks distinctly clerical.*]

LETTICE. The famous Wolf, Uncle Charles.

LORD REDCHESTER. The Wolf has honoured our little fold, Charles! Think of his finding out Tudor Manor!

BISHOP. And why—why has this notorious person found out Tudor Manor?

WOLF [*at safe, worried*]. Why d'you think? To ask for a blessing?

BISHOP. I will bless you if you desire it; but not while you endeavour to destroy Lord Redchester's new family safe and steal his family gifts.

WOLF [*taking his revolver*]. Cut it out. Any more back-answers and I'll plug you.

LORD REDCHESTER. Don't worry him, Charles. He's got his hands full.

WOLF [*back at safe*]. One of these damned Yankee puzzle-boxes that make you wish Columbus had never been born.

LADY REDCHESTER. You're not accustomed to an audience, of course.

WOLF. I'll have an audience of "stiffs" if you don't dry up.

BISHOP. May I speak?

WOLF. No! Shut your face!

LADY REDCHESTER. Be quiet, Charles.

BISHOP. I'll be quiet till he's finished. Then, as a lost sheep, it will be my duty to save him.

LETTICE. A lost sheep in wolf's clothing!

WOLF. "Wolves do change their hair, but not their hearts."

BISHOP. A classical quotation! You have known happier days, my poor fellow.

WOLF. Yes, and happier nights.

LORD REDCHESTER. Don't say that. Wait till you collar the swag. [*To the rest*] He's got a grand haul, you know. I'd bought a magnificent jade necklace for you, Sophy.

LADY REDCHESTER. You darling!

LORD REDCHESTER. A diamond tiara for Lettice—the one you admired in Bond Street, my treasure.

LETTICE. Oh! You angel, papa!

LORD REDCHESTER. A gold cigarette case for Guy—with a cheque in it.

GUY. You brick, Governor!

LORD REDCHESTER. And a new crosier for Charles—an episcopal crook—not your sort of crook, Wolf. A magnificent crosier set with astounding jewels. You'll love it.

BISHOP. My dear fellow! How did you guess? You never come to the cathedral. But it is true, the Redchester crosier is quite unworthy of us. I much want a handsome one for great occasions.

WOLF [*who has been working and failing*]. This infernal thing beats me! I can't get in! It's a new metal. The oxyhydrogen won't touch it!

LADY REDCHESTER. Oh dear!

GUY. "If at first you can't succeed——"

[*The* WOLF *stands back and stares at the safe.*]

LETTICE. He's tried so hard, papa. It'll ruin his Christmas if he fails.

WOLF. A new metal I tell you—a dirty Yankee trick! Blast the States, that's what I say. Why couldn't you be patriotic and buy an English safe?

LORD REDCHESTER. To tell you the truth I felt doubtful at the time. We stick to home-made things as a rule, though they are so inferior.

LADY REDCHESTER. Tell him the password, Redchester. He's done his best. We don't want to ruin his Christmas.

BISHOP. Make him promise not to take the crosier!

LETTICE. No, that's not fair, Uncle Charles. The Wolf always makes a clean sweep. That's what he's here for.

WOLF [*takes up revolver*]. Just so. A clean sweep I make. The password quick, or I plug you all! [*Whirls revolver.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Don't spoil it—don't be rude and violent! Put that thing down. I'd always intended to give you the password if you failed. Be bright, be sensible. Remember the day! The password is "Sophy."

LADY REDCHESTER. Always thinking of me!

[*The* WOLF *goes to safe and in a moment has it open. Enter* PRESTON *dressed as butler.*]

PRESTON. Is there anything your lordship is pleased to want?

WOLF. A sack for the swag, Preston. All stand back if you value your lives!

LORD REDCHESTER. A cricket bag will be better—easier to carry. One of the cricket bags, Preston.

[PRESTON *lifts his eyes to the ceiling and goes off.*]

WOLF. Now I'll see if you were talking through your hat.

GUY. My dear chap, a Sydney never talks through his hat.

WOLF. I'll see. [*Brings out a parcel from safe.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. That was to have been Lady Redchester's Christmas gift.

[WOLF *opens jewel-case and reveals a jade necklace with enormous beads as big as plovers' eggs.*]

LADY REDCHESTER. Redchester! How glorious! I didn't know there was such a jade necklace in the world.

WOLF. More did I!

LORD REDCHESTER. There isn't another! It belonged to the late Empress of China. I sent to China for it.

LETTICE. Do let mama just try it on, Wolf. They'd go so beautifully with her pink dressing-gown.

LADY REDCHESTER. Yes—yes—let me throw them round my neck for a moment, dear Wolf.

WOLF. No tricks, mind. [*Gives necklace to* LETTICE, *who puts it round* LADY REDCHESTER'S *throat.*] Any foul play and I'll plug her ladyship.

LORD REDCHESTER. You mustn't do that. Keep calm. You're among friends. Believe me, you can trust her.

[*They all applaud the necklace.*]

BISHOP. Magnificent, Sophy! You set them off superbly.

LORD REDCHESTER [*delighted*]. One of my successes —eh?

WOLF. They make her look younger.

LADY REDCHESTER. They do—I feel they do!

WOLF. And they make me feel younger. Worth a thousand, I'll bet.

LORD REDCHESTER. More, my boy, more!

[*The* WOLF *fetches out another large jewel-case from the safe.*]

LETTICE. It's like dipping into a bran-tub, isn't it, Wolf?

LORD REDCHESTER. That's the tiara, Lettice.

[PRESTON *returns with a cricket bag.*]

BISHOP [*aside to* PRESTON]. He proposes to take everything, Preston—the new episcopal crosier and everything!

PRESTON. Who'll take him? That's what I want to know.

LETTICE [*on seeing the tiara, which is a gorgeous affair*

of glittering diamonds, kisses LORD REDCHESTER]. Oh, papa, how heavenly of you!

BISHOP [*to* WOLF]. Does not this innocent maiden's happiness touch you?

WOLF. Cut it out. I'm here to do the touching.

LADY REDCHESTER. Let her try it on, Wolf—just once.

LETTICE. Do let me, Wolf—only for a moment.

WOLF [*giving her the tiara*]. Be quick, then. Can't stop here playing about all night. What's the time, Preston?

PRESTON [*consulting watch*]. Half after five.

GUY. There's no workmen's trains this morning. But perhaps you've ordered a "special"?

WOLF. You watch out, my lad! Any more sauce and I'll plug you. I come and go on a motor-bike.

GUY. Of course—you would. Rather bad roads I'm afraid.

WOLF. You're right. Worst roads in England.

BISHOP [*who has helped* LADY REDCHESTER *to put on* LETTICE'S *tiara*]. Exquisite! Amazing gems. What fire! What lustre!

LETTICE. Do you like it, Wolf?

WOLF. A touch to the left—that's right. Pretty tidy shiners. You can wear 'em for five minutes, then I'm off. Now for another dip.

LADY REDCHESTER. The iron nerve of the man!

LORD REDCHESTER. Isn't he wonderful? Napoleonic, Sophy!

BISHOP [*to* LADY REDCHESTER]. One feels there ought to be some way of circumventing him.

LADY REDCHESTER. Nobody has ever been known to circumvent the Wolf, Charles.

LORD REDCHESTER [*as* WOLF *reveals an absurdly large golden cigarette case*]. That's right; that Guy's cigarette case.

GUY. My dear Governor! What a dainty little masterpiece!

LETTICE. Why! I could pack a dress in that, papa!

LORD REDCHESTER. Don't forget the cheque.

WOLF [*opening case and looking at cheque*]. A thousand quid—eh? What a father! If I'd had a father like that—I might have been a very different man.

LORD REDCHESTER. But not so wonderful.

BISHOP. It's never too late to mend. Make a beginning to-night.

GUY. Let me have a squint at it. Cheque's no good to you anyway.

[*Takes cigarette case.*]

WOLF. It will be when you've signed it. A pen and ink, Preston. No tricks, mind—or——

[PRESTON *goes off.*]

GUY [*examining cigarette case*]. The arms and crest and motto and everything!

WOLF. Got a motto, have you?

BISHOP. The family motto. "Nec elata, nec dejecta." Which means "Neither elated nor cast down."

WOLF. Well, if you ain't cast down after this morning's work, I'll forgive you. It's a soft job like this that makes my life worth while.

LADY REDCHESTER. So glad!

WOLF [*going to safe*]. What's this? [*Brings out a long case.*] A fishing rod?

LORD REDCHESTER. The crosier—allow me. [*Takes case, opens it and brings out a wonderful, golden, Bishop's crook. It is very large and studded with enormous gems. He gives it to the Bishop.*]

LADY REDCHESTER. It suits you exactly, Charles! It might have been made for you.

LORD REDCHESTER. It was.

LETTICE. Gold always suits Uncle Charles.

WOLF. A flashy bit, sure enough. Real stones? Real gold?

LORD REDCHESTER. Would a Sydney give his Bishop brother sham ones, think you?

[PRESTON *returns with pen, ink and blotting paper. He puts them on the table beside whisky and soda.*]

LETTICE. Oh, Preston, just look at Uncle Charles!

PRESTON [*to* WOLF]. Don't that make you want to go on your knees, you bad man?

WOLF. Sign that cheque, Guy, right now. Then one more drink and I'm off. Now, ladies, please.

LADY REDCHESTER. One moment, my dear, good Wolf. You know I can't help feeling a *wee* bit of sentiment about this necklace. I'm an old woman and may not live to enjoy another Christmas such as this. I feel such wonderful things can never happen again. And if the necklace goes, it's all spoiled. [GUY *gives the* WOLF *a drink.*] If you take it away from me, you'll look back on this happy morning and feel—oh so sorry—so full of remorse!

LORD REDCHESTER [*to* WOLF]. I was afraid she'd begin to worry when it came to the point.

WOLF. Business is business.

LADY REDCHESTER. Then forget all about business for once. If you take my necklace, you'll look back and feel that you'd let business come before pleasure; and that's always such a silly thing to do. You had a mother once——

LORD REDCHESTER. And a clever one——

WOLF. Not a word against my mother!

LADY REDCHESTER. Indeed no. She must have been a proud woman. But think if somebody had stolen her jade necklace—if you had seen tears in her old eyes on Christmas morning. Relent, dear Wolf—for your mother's sake, let me keep the necklace.

WOLF. Cut it out! The necklace—or—[*revolver*].

LADY REDCHESTER [*taking it off*]. Well, I call it simply horrid of you. The papers say you are always nice to ladies—even old ones.

WOLF [*taking necklace and putting it in cricket bag.*] Ain't I been nice? Dammy, you people don't know

your luck. You might have been lying dead in a row—if it weren't Christmas morning.

GUY. By Jove—so we might!

LORD REDCHESTER. A terrific experience!

WOLF. The tiara, Lettice, and no more soft soap, please. It don't cut no ice with me.

LETTICE. Yes, the tiara. But do think twice about the tiara, Wolf. You don't really want it, do you? [*Putting her arms round his shoulders.*] No nice man ever wears diamonds. So yield, just this once, and make me a friend for life. Do let me keep them.

BISHOP. A true and lifelong friend is better than diamonds.

LETTICE. Yes, and Uncle Charles's crosier is so much more in your line. If I was your daughter—just think—you'd love me to wear a tiara then.

LADY REDCHESTER. I expect he has a horrid, greedy daughter like himself.

WOLF. I've got to work for my wife and family, ain't I! Work's work.

LETTICE. But not to-day. Not on Christmas morning! Everyone takes a holiday to-day. Do be Christmassy and kind-hearted, and then you'll feel so happy and pleased with yourself.

BISHOP. I dare say he has a heart of gold really.

WOLF. Cut it out!

PRESTON [*aside*]. I wish I could, you devil!

LORD REDCHESTER. Order, Preston!

LETTICE. Let me owe my Christmas rejoicings entirely to you! And when I hear you rob other people, then I'll always stick up for you and say they deserved it.

BISHOP. A good act is never forgotten—it never dies. What, after all, are these treasures, my poor Wolf, compared with those you might win if you reform and join the ranks of the trustworthy, honourable and virtuous? Let this glad anniversary——

WOLF. Stow it! [*To* LETTICE] D'you want me to abandon my craft and start keeping rabbits?

GUY. Have some of ours. We've got millions.

WOLF. The tiara, or I'll take it.

LETTICE [*giving it to him*]. You're a cad—that's what you are—an utter bounder! I hate you!

WOLF [*putting tiara in cricket bag*]. And not the only one, my ladybird.

LADY REDCHESTER. What are all you men about to see us robbed in this way?

LORD REDCHESTER. My dear Sophy, where's your sense of humour? A terrific experience—the event of a lifetime. Do try to appreciate it!

WOLF. The gold portmanteau, Guy.

GUY. All right—all right. [*Hands it over.*] Let me keep the cheque—for luck—eh?

WOLF. The cheque, too—and if it's stopped, I come back and plug the family.

[GUY *hands over the cheque.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. Well worth the money—marvellous—Napoleonic!

WOLF. And now the crosier, Bishop. It'll be morning before I hop it.

BISHOP. It is the morning, my dear fellow. Hark! What do I hear? Open the window, Preston.

[PRESTON *draws curtains and throws open the window. A dim, white light. Bells are heard faintly chiming in the distance.*]

LADY REDCHESTER. The dear old cathedral bells.

LETTICE. Ringing in dear old Christmas morning!

BISHOP. Again the glad tidings of peace and goodwill to man are whispering in our ears. Again we lift up our hearts and renew our faith and trust, both in heaven and our fellow creatures. Again the message of love, charity, benevolence comes to us with the gracious Christmas dawn—to tell us of the beauty of self-denial, of the well-laden board and generous vintage, of good gifts—taken and given—of——

WOLF. The crook and look slippy!

BISHOP. The Christmas bells, Wolf.

WOLF. The Christmas bills, Bishop. I've got an expensive family and rather expensive tastes myself, I may tell you. [*Takes crosier and puts it into cricket bag.*]

LORD REDCHESTER [*delighted, to* LADY REDCHESTER]. Too much, even for Charles.

LADY REDCHESTER [*to* BISHOP]. Can nothing be done?

BISHOP. Yes, I have a trump card up my sleeve.

LADY REDCHESTER. Play it, then, for goodness sake.

BISHOP. Don't strap up that bag for a moment. Listen to me. You might do much better than that —much better. I'm sure your conscience will always prick you if you take those trifles when you might secure a huge fortune instead.

WOLF. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, old top!

BISHOP. My dear friend, I know a bush with a magnificent bird in it, which you could secure with no trouble whatever.

WOLF [*to* PRESTON]. Pack up my hand-bag, Preston.

[PRESTON *collects tools and lamp from floor and puts them into the* WOLF'S *bag.*]

WOLF [*to* BISHOP]. My turkey's waiting for me at home.

BISHOP. But what about a turkey worth half a million?

WOLF. Where? [*Takes another cigar.*]

BISHOP. Listen, and I'll tell you. Have you heard of Lord Wallaby, the Australian multi-millionaire?

WOLF. Who hasn't?

BISHOP. He is now our next door neighbour and has just secured a Tudor mansion and enormous estate, three miles from here. Our dear old cathedral is tumbling down and I have invited Lord Wallaby to rebuild it. He absolutely declines to do so, and

now Providence has evidently sent you to punish him for his impiety. He is worth ten millions, and being a vulgar creature, very fond of display, he exhibits a part of this wealth in a service of astounding gold plate on his dining-room sideboard. It is said to be worth two hundred thousand pounds. Then, in his drawing-room, there stands a cabinet containing five hundred small, quite portable pieces of old china, each worth over a thousand pounds.

WOLF. Now you're talking.

BISHOP. I am. We are acquainted with the Wallabys. We knew the place quite well—before their time—decent people lived there once.

GUY. I know it inside out. There's a little window on the right side of the main entrance you could walk through.

BISHOP. The grand point is this. The Wallabys are newcomers—just settling in—and people just settling into a new house never think of burglars.

WOLF. That's right. You might be one of us yourself.

LORD REDCHESTER. The Wallabys dine with us to-night. Wallaby can never eat anything that isn't cooked by a French chef, and his has run away, so we take pity on the man and he's coming to try ours.

WOLF. Coming here to-night?

BISHOP. Exactly. The whole family. And the servants all live at the other end of the mansion, and they will be keeping Christmas, you under-

stand. From eight till eleven the place is at your mercy.

WOLF. Sounds good enough.

LADY REDCHESTER. Quite! And then, instead of a mere few thousand pounds, you will make very likely a hundred thousand.

BISHOP. More. With his incomparable skill and audacity, he will do far better than that. [*To the* WOLF] But you see the position, of course? If you take the contents of that cricket bag, we shall tell Lord Wallaby immediately after breakfast that you have done so. Then he will make the necessary preparations and the opportunity of a lifetime is lost. But if you prefer these trifling mementoes to the priceless Wallaby collection, you will not be the wonderful man I take you for.

GUY. We would lend you our touring car to get the booty to town.

WOLF. Thanks; but I'll make my own arrangements. Not a whisper to the Wallabys, mind.

LORD REDCHESTER. The word of a Sydney, my dear fellow. Not a whisper!

WOLF. Right-o! It's good enough. I trust you. [*Opening bag.*] Here you are, girls! Here's your "hold-all," Guy; and there's the Bishop's little lot. And mind this: break faith and I come back and plug—— [*Holds all the presents.*]

GUY. We couldn't break faith, my dear chap. The Sydneys are faithful unto death.

WOLF. *My* Christmas presents—see? [*Gives the presents back.*]

LADY REDCHESTER. He was dear Santa Claus, after all! [*She and* LETTICE *put on their jewels.* BISHOP *bows and regains his crosier.*]

WOLF. I shan't want the cricket bag, Preston. [*To* LORD REDCHESTER] Here's a keepsake for you, too—my automatic. It isn't loaded.

LORD REDCHESTER. My dear fellow—a noble curio! An heirloom! But I'm robbing you?

WOLF. I've got plenty more. So long then. To-night, mind. And don't you let the Wallabys hop home again till after eleven o'clock. Keep 'em here.

LETTICE. We will.

GUY. Remember. The little window beside the main entrance—left of the portico, behind a holly bush. Then through the hall and the old armour and stuff to dining-room for gold plate—third door on left—and drawing-room for curios in cabinet beside the fireplace—second door on right.

WOLF [*making a note*]. Right-o! That lets me out then.

[*Goes to window.*]

LORD REDCHESTER. A ladder, Preston.

WOLF. Cat burglars don't want ladders. [*Half out of window.*]

LADY REDCHESTER [*shaking hands*]. *Good*-bye. We shall never forget you.

LETTICE [*shaking hands*]. Good-bye, dear Wolf! Do take care of yourself!

GUY [*shaking hands*]. Call at the Sports Club some day and let me put you up for membership.

BISHOP [*shaking hands*]. Come to the cathedral when you are at leisure. You really ought to turn over a new leaf after to-night.

WOLF. And don't none of you say no more hard words of the Wolf.

[*Sinks out of sight. They look out of the window.*]

ALL. We won't! We won't! [*Looking out of window.*] A merry Christmas!

WOLF [*outside*]. And a 'appy New Year!

LORD REDCHESTER [*to* PRESTON]. Run out and see he has petrol for his machine and anything else he may need, Preston.

PRESTON. My Lord!

LORD REDCHESTER. At once, Preston, or I'll plug you!

[*Exit* PRESTON. LADY REDCHESTER *comes back from window.*]

LETTICE [*waves her hand out of window, then comes in.*] He's gone, papa!

BISHOP. Thus we see how Providence never forgets the Sydneys.

LORD REDCHESTER. Grand fellow! Something to talk about at last!

From "Three Short Plays."

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS

LORD DUNSANY

THE TENTS OF THE ARABS[1]

LORD DUNSANY

CHARACTERS

THE KING
BEL-NARB } *Camel-drivers*
AOOB }
THE CHAMBERLAIN
ZABRA, *a Notable*
EZNARZA, *a Gypsy of the Desert*

SCENE: *Outside the gate of the city of Thalanna.*
TIME: *Uncertain.*

ACT I

BEL-NARB. By evening we shall be in the desert again.

AOOB. Yes.

BEL-NARB. Then no more city for us for many weeks.

AOOB. Ah!

BEL-NARB. We shall see the lights come out, looking back from the camel-track; that is the last we shall see of it.

AOOB. We shall be in the desert then.

BEL-NARB. The old angry desert.

AOOB. How cunningly the Desert hides his wells! You would say he had an enmity with man. He does not welcome you as the cities do.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances to be made to Messrs. Samuel French, Ltd., 26, Southampton Street, London, W.C.2.

BEL-NARB. He *has* an enmity. I hate the desert.

AOOB. I think there is nothing in the world so beautiful as cities.

BEL-NARB. Cities are beautiful things.

AOOB. I think they are loveliest a little after dawn when night falls off from the houses. They draw it away from them slowly and let it fall like a cloak and stand quite naked in their beauty to shine in some broad river, and the light comes up and kisses them on the forehead. I think they are loveliest then. The voices of men and women begin to arise in the streets, scarce audible, one by one, till a slow loud murmur arises and all the voices are one. I often think the city speaks to me then: she says in that voice of hers, "Aoob, Aoob, who one of these days shall die, I am not earthly, I have been always, I shall not die."

BEL-NARB. I do not think that cities are loveliest at dawn. We can see dawn in the desert any day. I think they are loveliest just when the sun is set, and a dusk steals along the narrower streets, a dusk that is not of the night yet not of the day, a kind of mystery in which we can see cloaked figures, and yet not quite discern whose figures they be. And just when it would be dark, and out in the desert there would be nothing to see but a black horizon and black sky on top of it, just then the swinging lanterns are lighted up, and lights come out in windows one by one, and all the colours of the raiments change. Then a woman, perhaps, will slip from a little door and go away up the street into the night, and a man, perhaps, will steal by with a dagger for some old

quarrel's sake, and Skarmi will light up his house to sell brandy all night long, and men will sit on benches outside his door playing skabash by the glare of a small green lantern, while they light great bubbling pipes and smoke nargroob. O it is all very good to watch! And I like to think as I smoke and see these things that somewhere, far away, the desert has put up a huge red cloud like a wing, so that all the Arabs know that next day the Siroc will blow, the accursed breath of Eblis, the father of Satan.

AOOB. Yes, it is pleasant to think of the Siroc when one is safe in a city, but I do not like to think about it now, for before the day is out we will be taking pilgrims to Mecca; and who ever prophesied or knew by wit what the desert had in store? Going into the desert is like throwing bone after bone to a dog, some he will catch and some of them he will drop. He may catch our bones, or we may go by and come to gleaming Mecca. O-ho, I would I were a merchant with a little booth in a frequented street to sit all day and barter.

BEL-NARB. Aye, it is easier to cheat some lord coming to buy silk and ornaments in a city than to cheat death in the desert. O the desert, the desert, I love the beautiful cities and I hate the desert.

AOOB [*pointing off*, L.]. Who is that?

BEL-NARB. What? There by the desert's edge where the camels are?

AOOB. Yes, who is it?

BEL-NARB. He is staring across the desert the way

that the camels go. They say that the King go down to the edge of the desert and often stares acro it. He stands there for a long time of an evenin looking towards Mecca.

AOOB. Of what use is it to the King to loo towards Mecca? He cannot go to Mecca. H cannot go into the desert for one day. Messenge would run after him and cry his name, and bring hi back to the council-hall or to the chamber of jud ments. If they could not find him their heads wou be struck off and put high up upon some windy roo the judges would point at them and say, "They s better there!"

BEL-NARB. No, the King cannot go away in the desert. If God were to make me King I wou go down to the edge of the desert once, and I wou shake the sand out of my turban and out of my bea and then I would never look at the desert agai Greedy and parched old parent of thousands devils! He might cover the wells with sand, a blow with his Siroc, year after year and century aft century, and never earn one of my curses—if Go made me King.

AOOB. They say you are like the King.

BEL-NARB. Yes, I *am* like the King. Becau his father disguised himself as a camel-driver a came through our villages! I often say to myse "God is just. And if I could disguise myself as t King and drive him out to be a camel-driver, th would please God, for He is just."

AOOB. If you did this God would say, "Loo at Bel-Narb, whom I made to be a camel-driver, a

who has forgotten this." And then He would forget you, Bel-Narb.

BEL-NARB. Who knows what God would say?

AOOB. Who knows? His ways are wonderful.

BEL-NARB. I would not do this thing, Aoob. I would not do it. It is only what I say to myself as I smoke, or at night out in the desert. I say to myself, "Bel-Narb is King in Thalanna." And then I say, "Chamberlain, bring Skarmi here with his brandy and his lanterns and boards to play skabash, and let all the town come and drink before the palace and magnify my name."

PILGRIMS [*calling off*, L.]. Bel-Narb! Bel-Narb! Child of two dogs. Come and untether your camels. Come and start for holy Mecca.

BEL-NARB. A curse on the desert.

AOOB. The camels are rising. The caravan starts for Mecca. Farewell, beautiful city.

[PILGRIMS' *voices off:* "Bel-Narb! Bel-Narb!"]

BEL-NARB. I come, children of sin.

[*Exeunt* BEL-NARB *and* AOOB.]

[*The* KING *enters through the great door, crowned. He sits upon the step.*]

KING. A crown should not be worn upon the head. A sceptre should not be carried in Kings' hands. But a crown should be wrought into a golden chain, and a sceptre driven stake-wise into the ground so that a King may be chained to it by the ankle. Then he would know that he might not stray away into the beautiful desert and might never see the palm trees by the wells. O Thalanna,

Thalanna, how I hate this city with its narrow, narrow ways, and evening after evening drunken men playing skabash in the scandalous gambling house of that old scoundrel Skarmi. O that I might marry the child of some unkingly house, that generation to generation had never known a city, and that we might ride from here down the long track through the desert, always we two alone, till we came to the tents of the Arabs. And the crown—some foolish, greedy man should be given it to his sorrow. And all this may not be, for a King is yet a King.

[*Enter* CHAMBERLAIN *through door*.]

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty!

KING. Well, my lord Chamberlain, have you *more* work for me to do?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, there is much to do.

KING. I had hoped for freedom for this evening, for the faces of the camels are towards Mecca, and I would see the caravans move off into the desert, where I may not go.

CHAMBERLAIN. There is very much for your Majesty to do. Iktra has revolted.

KING. Where is Iktra?

CHAMBERLAIN. It is a little country tributary to your Majesty, beyond Zebdarlon, up among the hills.

KING. Almost, had it not been for this, almost I had asked you to let me go away among the camel-drivers to golden Mecca. I have done the work of a King now for five years and listened to my councillors, and all the while the Desert called to me; he said,

"Come to the tents of my children, to the tents of my children!" And all the while I dwelt among these walls.

CHAMBERLAIN. If your Majesty left the city now—

KING. I will not; we must raise an army to punish the men of Iktra.

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty will appoint the commanders by name. A tribe of your Majesty's fighting men must be summoned from Agrarva and another from Coloono, the jungle city, as well as one from Mirsk. This must be done by warrants sealed by your hand. Your Majesty's advisers await you in the council-hall.

KING. The sun is very low. Why have the caravans not started yet?

CHAMBERLAIN. I do not know. And then your Majesty——

KING [*laying his hand on the* CHAMBERLAIN'S *arm*]. Look, look! It is the shadows of the camels moving towards Mecca. How silently they slip over the ground, beautiful shadows! Soon they are out in the desert flat on the golden sands. And then the sun will set and they will be one with night.

CHAMBERLAIN. If your Majesty has time for such things there are the camels themselves.

KING. No, no, I do not wish to watch the camels. They can never take me out to the beautiful desert to be free for ever from cities. Here I must stay to do the work of a king. Only my dreams can go; and the shadows of the camels carry them to find peace by the tents of the Arabs.

CHAMBERLAIN. Will your Majesty now come to the council-hall?

KING. Yes, yes, I come.

[*Voices off:* "Ho-*Yo!* Ho-*Yay!* . . . Ho-*Yo.* Ho-*Yay!*"]

Now the whole caravan has started. Hark to the drivers of the baggage camels. They will run behind them for the first ten miles, and to-morrow they will mount them. They will be out of sight of Thalanna then, and the desert will lie all round them with sunlight falling on its golden smiles. And a new look will come into their faces. I am sure that the desert whispers to them by night saying, "Be at peace, my children, at peace, my children."

[*Meanwhile the* CHAMBERLAIN *has opened the door for the* KING *and is waiting there bowing, with his hand resolutely on the opened door.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty will come to the council-hall?

KING. Yes, I will come. Had it not been for Iktra I might have gone away and lived in the golden desert for a year, and seen holy Mecca.

CHAMBERLAIN. Perhaps your Majesty might have gone had it not been for Iktra.

KING. My curse upon Iktra! [*He goes through the doorway.*]

[*As they stand in doorway enter* ZABRA, R.]

ZABRA. Your Majesty.

KING. O-ho. More work for an unhappy King.

ZABRA. Iktra is pacified.

KING. Is pacified?

ZABRA. It happened suddenly. The men of Iktra met with a few of your Majesty's fighting men and an arrow chanced to kill the leader of the revolt, and therefore the mob fled away, although they were many, and they have all cried for three hours, "Great is the King!"

KING. I will even yet see Mecca, and the dreamed-of tents of the Arabs. I will go down now into the golden sands, I——

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty——

KING. In a few years I will return to you.

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty, it cannot be. We could not govern the people for more than a year. They would say, "The King is dead, the King——"

KING. Then I will return in a year. In one year only.

CHAMBERLAIN. It is a long time, your Majesty.

KING. I will return at noon a year from to-day.

CHAMBERLAIN. But, your Majesty, a princess is being sent for from Tharba.

KING. I thought one was coming from Karshish.

CHAMBERLAIN. It has been thought more advisable that your Majesty should wed in Tharba. The passes across the mountains belong to the King of Tharba and he has great traffic with Sharan and the Isles.

KING. Let it be as you will.

CHAMBERLAIN. But, your Majesty, the ambassadors start this week; the princess will be here in three months' time.

KING. Let her come in a year and a day.

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty!

KING. Farewell, I am in haste. I go to make ready for the desert. [*Exit through door, still speaking.*] The olden, golden mother of happy men.

CHAMBERLAIN [*to* ZABRA]. One from whom God had not withheld all wisdom would not have given that message to our crazy young King.

ZABRA. But it must be known. Many things might happen if it were not known at once.

CHAMBERLAIN. I knew it this morning. He is off to the desert now.

ZABRA. That is evil indeed; but we can lure him back.

CHAMBERLAIN. Perhaps not for many days.

ZABRA. The King's favour is like gold.

CHAMBERLAIN. It is like much gold. Who are the Arabs that the King's favour should be cast among them? The walls of their houses are canvas. Even the common snail has a finer wall to his house.

ZABRA. O it is most evil. Alas that I told him this! We shall be poor men.

CHAMBERLAIN. No one will give us gold for many days.

ZABRA. Yet you will govern Thalanna while he is away. You can increase the taxes of the merchants and the tribute of the men that till the fields.

CHAMBERLAIN. They will only pay taxes and tribute to the King, who gives of his bounty to just and upright men when he is in Thalanna. But while

he is away the surfeit of his wealth will go to unjust men, and to men whose beards are unclean and who fear not God.

ZABRA. We shall indeed be poor.

CHAMBERLAIN. A little gold perhaps from evil-doers for justice. Or a little money to decide the dispute of some righteous wealthy man ; but no more till the King returns, whom God prosper.

ZABRA. God increase him. Will you yet try to detain him ?

CHAMBERLAIN. No. When he comes by with his retinue and escort I will walk beside his horse and tell him that a progress through the desert will well impress the Arabs with his splendour and turn their hearts towards him. And I will speak privily to some captain at the rear of the escort and he shall afterwards speak to the chief commander, that he may lose the camel-track in a few days' time and take the King and his followers to wander in the desert, and so return by chance to Thalanna again. And it may yet be well with us. We will wait here till they come by.

ZABRA. Will the chief commander do this thing certainly ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, he will be one Thakbar, a poor man and a righteous.

ZABRA. But if he be not Thakbar but some greedy man who demands more gold than we would give to Thakbar ?

CHAMBERLAIN. Why, then we must give him even what he demands, and God will punish his greed.

ZABRA. He must come past us here.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, he must come this way. He will summon the cavalry from the Saloia Samang.

ZABRA. It will be nearly dark before they can come.

CHAMBERLAIN. No, he is in great haste. He will pass before sunset. He will make them mount at once.

ZABRA [*looking off*, R.]. I do not see any stir at the Saloia.

CHAMBERLAIN [*looking too*]. No—no. I do not see. He will *make* a stir.

[*As they look a man comes through the doorway wearing a coarse brown cloak which falls over his forehead. Exit furtively*, L.]

What man is that? He has gone down to the camels.

ZABRA. He has given a piece of money to one of the camel-drivers.

CHAMBERLAIN. See, he has mounted.

ZABRA. Can it have been the King?

[*Voice off*, L.: "Ho-*Yo*. Ho-*Yay!*"]

CHAMBERLAIN. It is only some camel-driver going into the desert. How glad his voice sounds!

ZABRA. The Siroc will swallow him.

CHAMBERLAIN. What—if it *were* the King!

ZABRA. Why, if it were the King we should starve for a year.

[*One year elapses between the first and second acts.*]

Act II

The same scene.

[*The* KING, *wrapped in a camel-driver's cloak, sits by* EZNARZA, *a gypsy of the desert.*]

KING. Now I have known the desert and dwelt in the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA. There is no land like the desert, and like the Arabs no people.

KING. It is all over and done, I return to the walls of my fathers.

EZNARZA. Time cannot put it away, I go back to the desert that nursed me.

KING. Did you think in those days on the sands, or among the tents in the mornings, that my year would ever end, and I be brought away by strength of my word to the prisoning of my palace?

EZNARZA. I knew that Time would do it, for my people have learned the way of him.

KING. Is it then Time that has mocked our futile prayers? Is he greater than God that he has laughed at our praying?

EZNARZA. We may not say that he is greater than God. Yet we prayed that our own year might not pass away. God could not save it.

KING. Yes, yes. We prayed that prayer. All men would laugh at it.

EZNARZA. The prayer was not laughable. Only he that is lord of the years is obdurate. If a man prayed for life to a furious, merciless Sultan, well might the Sultan's slaves laugh. Yet it is not laughable to pray for life.

KING. Yes, we are slaves of Time. To-morrow brings the princess who comes from Tharba. We must bow our heads.

EZNARZA. My people say that Time lives in the desert. He lies there in the sun.

KING. No, no, not in the desert. Nothing alters there.

EZNARZA. My people say that the desert is his country. He smites not his own country, my people say. But he overwhelms all other lands of the world.

KING. Yes, the desert is always the same, even the littlest rocks of it.

EZNARZA. They say that he loves the Sphinx and does not harm her. They say that he does not dare to harm the Sphinx. She has borne him many gods whom the infidels worship.

KING. Their father is more terrible than all the false gods.

EZNARZA. O that he had but spared our little year!

KING. He destroys all things utterly.

EZNARZA. There is a little child of man that is mightier than he, and who saves the world from Time.

KING. Who is this little child that is mightier than Time? Is it Love that is mightier?

EZNARZA. No, not Love.

KING. If he conquer even Love, then none is mightier.

EZNARZA. He scares Love away with weak, white hairs and with wrinkles. Poor little love, poor Love, Time scares him away.

KING. What is this child of man that can conquer Time and that is braver than Love?

EZNARZA. Even Memory.

KING. Yes. I will call to him when the wind is from the desert and the locusts are beaten against my obdurate walls. I will call to him more when I cannot see the desert and cannot hear the wind of it.

EZNARZA. He shall bring back our year to us that Time cannot destroy. Time cannot slaughter it if Memory says no. It is reprieved, though banished. We shall often see it, though a little far off, and all its hours and days shall dance to us and go by one by one and come back and dance again.

KING. Why, that is true. They shall come back to us. I had thought that they that work miracles, whether in Heaven or Earth, were unable to do one thing. I thought that they could not bring back days again when once they had fallen into the hands of Time.

EZNARZA. It is a trick that Memory can do. He comes up softly in the town or the desert, wherever a few men are, like the strange dark conjurers who sing to snakes, and he does his trick before them, and does it again and again.

KING. We will often make him bring the old days back when you are gone to your people and I am miserably wedded to the princess coming from Tharba.

EZNARZA. They will come with sand on their feet from the golden, beautiful desert; they will come with a long-gone sunset each one over his head. Their lips will laugh with the olden evening voices.

KING. It is nearly noon. It is nearly noon. It is nearly noon.

EZNARZA. Why, we part then.

KING. O come into the city and be Queen there. I will send its princess back again to Tharba. You shall be Queen in Thalanna.

EZNARZA. I go now back to my people. You will wed the princess from Tharba on the morrow. You have said it. I have said it.

KING. O that I had not given my word to return!

EZNARZA. A King's word is like a King's crown and a King's sceptre and a King's throne. It is, in fact, a foolish thing, like a city.

KING. I cannot break my word. But you can be Queen in Thalanna.

EZNARZA. Thalanna will not have a gypsy for a Queen.

KING. I will make Thalanna have her for a Queen.

EZNARZA. You cannot make a gypsy live for a year in a city.

KING. I knew of a gypsy that lived once in a city.

EZNARZA. Not such a gypsy as I . . . come back to the tents of the Arabs.

KING. I cannot. I gave my word.

EZNARZA. Kings have broken their words.

KING. Not such a King as I.

EZNARZA. We have only that little child of ma whose name is Memory.

KING. Come. He shall bring back to us, before we part, one of those days that were banished.

EZNARZA. Let it be the first day. The day we met by the well when the camels came to El-Lolith.

KING. Our year lacked some few days. For my year began here. The camels were some days out.

EZNARZA. You were riding a little wide of the caravan, upon the side of the sunset. Your camel was swinging on with easy strides. But you were tired.

KING. You had come to the well for water. At first I could see your eyes, then the stars came out, and it grew dark and I only saw your shape, and there was a little light about your hair: I do not know if it was the light of the stars, I only knew that it shone.

EZNARZA. And then you spoke to me about the camels.

KING. Then I heard your voice. You did not say the things you would say now.

EZNARZA. Of course I did not.

KING. You did not say things in the same way even.

EZNARZA. How the hours come dancing back!

KING. No, no. Only their shadows. We went together then to holy Mecca. We dwelt alone in tents in the golden desert. We heard the wild, free Day sing songs in his freedom; we heard the beautiful night wind. Nothing remains of our year but desolate shadows. Memory whips them and they will not dance.

[EZNARZA *does not answer.*]

We made our farewells where the desert was. The city shall not hear them.

[EZNARZA *covers her face. The* KING *rises softly and walks up the steps. Enter*, L., *the* CHAMBERLAIN *and* ZABRA, *only noticing each other.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. He will come. He will come.

ZABRA. But it is noon now. Our fatness has left us. Our enemies mock at us. If he does not come God has forgotten us, and our friends will pity us.

[*Enter* BEL-NARB *and* AOOB.]

CHAMBERLAIN. If he is alive he will come.

ZABRA. I fear that it is past noon.

CHAMBERLAIN. Then he is dead or robbers have waylaid them.

[CHAMBERLAIN *and* ZABRA *put dust upon their heads.*]

BEL-NARB [*to* AOOB]. God is just!

[*To* CHAMBERLAIN *and* ZABRA]:

I am the King.

[*The* KING'S *hand is on the door. When* BEL-NARB *says this he goes down the steps again and sits beside the gypsy. She raises her head from her hands and looks at him fixedly. He watches* BEL-NARB, *and the* CHAMBERLAIN *and* ZABRA. *He partially covers his face, Arab fashion.*]

CHAMBERLAIN. Are you indeed the King?

BEL-NARB. I am the King.

CHAMBERLAIN. Your Majesty has altered much since a year ago.

BEL-NARB. Men alter in the desert. And alter much.

AOOB. Indeed, your Excellency, he is the King. When the King went into the desert disguised I fed his camel. Indeed, he is the King.

ZABRA. He is the King. I know the King when I see him.

CHAMBERLAIN. You have seen the King seldom.

ZABRA. I have often seen the King.

BEL-NARB. Yes, we have often met, often and often.

CHAMBERLAIN. If someone could recognize your Majesty, someone besides this man who came with you, then we should all be certain.

BEL-NARB. There is no need of it. I am the King.
[*The* KING *rises and stretches out his hand, palm downwards.*]

KING. In holy Mecca, in green-roofed Mecca of the many gates, we knew him for the King.

BEL-NARB. Yes, that is true. I saw this man in Mecca.

CHAMBERLAIN [*bowing low*]. Pardon, your Majesty, the desert had altered you.

ZABRA. I knew your Majesty.

AOOB. As well as I do.

BEL-NARB [*pointing to the* KING]. Let this man be rewarded suitably. Give him some post in the palace.

CHAMBERLAIN. Yes, your Majesty.

KING. I am a camel-driver and we go back to our camels.

CHAMBERLAIN. As you wish.

[*Exeunt* BEL-NARB, AOOB, CHAMBERLAIN *an*
ZABRA *through door.*]

EZNARZA. You have done wisely, wisely, and th
reward of wisdom is happiness.

KING. They have their king now. But we wi
turn again to the tents of the Arabs.

EZNARZA. They are foolish people.

KING. They have found a foolish King.

EZNARZA. It is a foolish man that would choo
to dwell among walls.

KING. Some are born kings, but this man h
chosen to be one.

EZNARZA. Come, let us leave them.

KING. We will go back again.

EZNARZA. Come back to the tents of my peopl

KING. We will dwell a little apart in a dear brov
tent of our own.

EZNARZA. We shall hear the sand again, whispe
ing low to the dawn wind.

KING. We shall hear the nomads stirring in th
camps far off because it is dawn.

EZNARZA. The jackals will patter past us slippi
back to the hills.

KING. When at evening the sun is set, we sh
weep for no day that is gone.

EZNARZA. I will raise up my head of a nig
time against the sky, and the old, old unbou
stars shall twinkle through my hair, and we shall
envy any of the diademed queens of the world.